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Scottish Bird News

No 81 Sept. 2006

The Breeding Bird Survey in Scotland (1994–2005)

A BTO fieldworker on survey in the Scottish hills (Peter M. Wilson)

You may have read recently about the changing fortunes of some of Scotland's birds, as the BTO/JNCC/RSPB Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) results for 2005 were released. The survey is now the main scheme for keeping track of the changing numbers of widespread and common breeding birds in Scotland. BTO Scotland is extremely grateful for the help of SOC members taking part in the survey and for the continuing support from SOC in promoting the survey.

Record Coverage in Scotland

BBS participation is at its highest level since the scheme started in 1994, which is great news for bird conservation. In 2005, over 200 BBS observers in Scotland surveyed 302 sites, enabling us to monitor the changing numbers of 54 species. However, if we can attract more volunteers we could calculate population trends for many localised or declining species, such as Grey Partridge, Whinchat and Spotted Flycatcher. If you are an active birdwatcher and think you can help, then please read on.

Coverage in 2005

In addition to being able to calculate trends for more species, we are keen to increase coverage in upland areas, particularly in the southwest and in the Highlands and Islands.

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Figure 1.

The coverage map (Fig 1.) shows a concentration of squares being surveyed in the populous central belt of Scotland, but also encouragingly in less populated areas such as Northeast Scotland, Lewis & Harris, Orkney and Skye.

The following areas are however in desperate need of more volunteers: Argyllshire (mainland), Arran, Caithness, Inverness-shire (west), Jura, Perthshire, Shetland, Sutherland, Kirkcudbright and Wigtownshire.

The most widespread species, new species...

A total of 166 species was recorded on BBS visits in Scotland in 2005 and, of these, Chaffinch was the most widespread, being noted on 78% of surveyed squares, followed by Wren (77%). Mandarin, Black-tailed Godwit, Ring-necked Parakeet and Lapland Bunting were recorded for the first time on BBS squares in Scotland. A number of species that are on the edge of their natural range in

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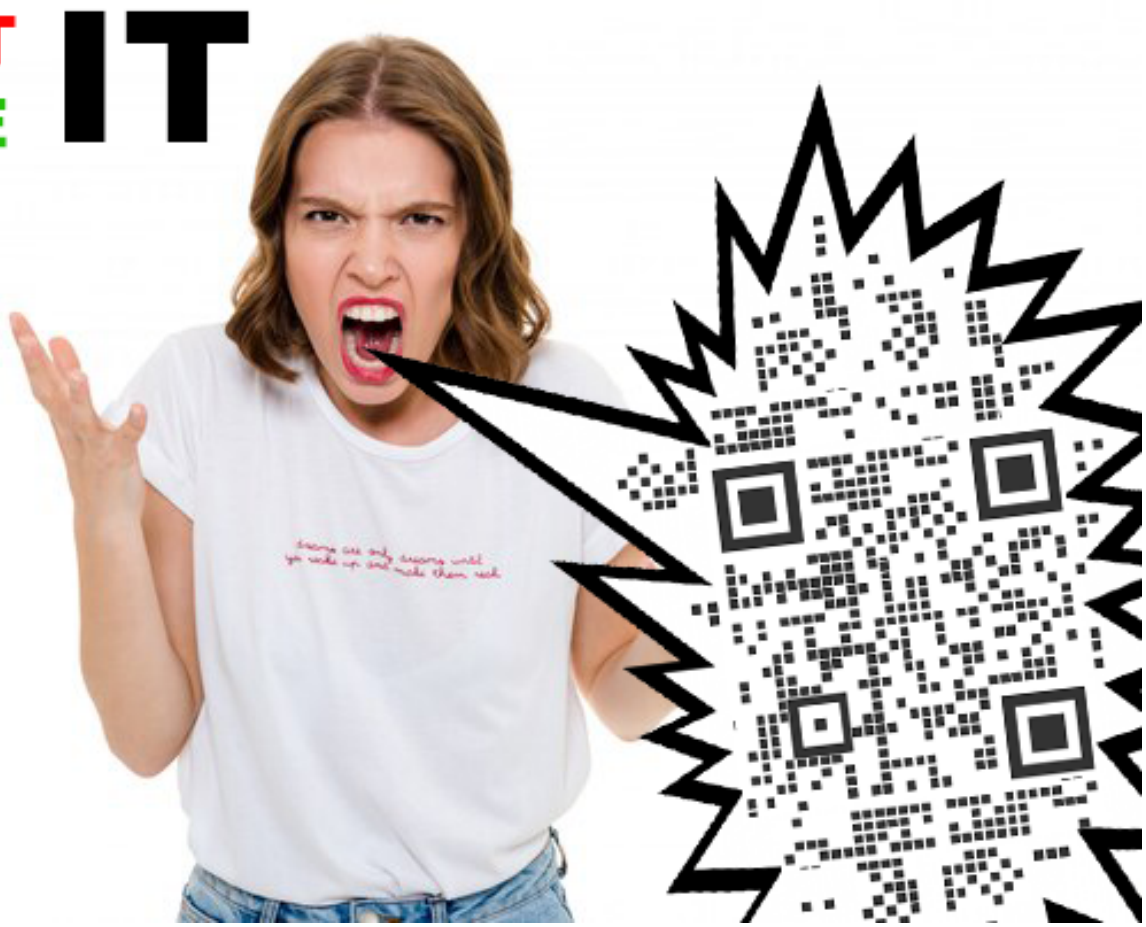

Scotland were also noted (Reed Warbler, Lesser Whitethroat, Nuthatch and Marsh Tit), plus a selection of late winter visitors (Whooper Swan, White-fronted Goose, Pink-footed Goose, Great Northern Diver, Purple Sandpiper, Sanderling, Turnstone and Brambling) some of which are potential breeders in Scotland.

Population trends

In order to calculate population trends each species must occur on an average of 30 or more squares. Of the 54 species in Scotland, seven had declined significantly and 23 had increased significantly between 1994 and 2005.

Population changes in Scotland for species recorded on a mean of 30 or more squares per year for 2004–05 and 1994–2005.

Figure 2. *The figures presented in the trends table below are the percentage changes in population levels for the respective time periods, marked with an asterisk where significant. The sample size indicated is the mean number of squares occupied each year over the survey period 1994–2005 (excluding squares where the species was recorded in only one year). Species in bold are Red-listed and those in italics Amber-listed in Population Status of Birds in the UK.*

Species in Scotland compared with England

For many species, the trends in Scotland were broadly similar to those in England, including significant increases in Buzzard, Swallow, House Martin, Robin, Blackbird, Song Thrush, Whitethroat, Blackcap, Goldcrest, Coal Tit, Blue Tit, Great Tit and Goldfinch. Blackcap and Goldfinch have expanded their range northwards in Scotland in recent years. At the other end of the spectrum, numbers of Curlew, Swift and Meadow Pipit all declined significantly in both countries.

A number of species continue to fare better in Scotland than in other parts of the country. Willow Warbler numbers increased significantly in Scotland and Northern Ireland during 1994–2005, whereas their counterparts in England and Wales declined. Likewise, Mistle Thrush (Figure 3), Starling, House Sparrow and Linnet all increased significantly north of the border, whilst showing a downward trend in England. Cuckoo, Skylark and Yellowhammer also declined significantly in England, but showed no significant trend in Scotland.

Scottish Species First for BBS

Fourteen species were recorded on an average of 20–29 squares in Scotland over the entire survey period, and hence too few squares for Scottish population trends to be calculated (Grey Partridge, Redshank, Stock Dove, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Sand Martin, Tree Pipit, Grey Wagtail, Dipper, Whinchat, Stonechat, Chiffchaff, Spotted Flycatcher, Long-tailed Tit and Treecreeper). However, as a result of increased coverage, the BBS is now able to monitor the changing numbers of Bullfinch in Scotland for the first time.

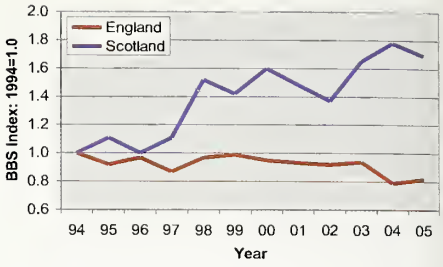

Figure 3. *Mistle Thrush population trends*

Blackcap: The Blackcap continues to be one of the country's most successful summer visitors, with numbers increasing by 23% in Scotland between 2004 and 2005, having more than doubled since the start of the survey in 1994. This upward trend is also being recorded in England and Wales and over the past 30 years there has been a range expansion into northern Scotland, earlier egg laying and an increasing number of birds staying through the winter in gardens. The reasons for this increase remain unclear, although climatic warming is probably allowing this species to spread its range northwards.

Continued page 6

Species	*Sample*	*Change 04–05*	*Change 94–05*		*lcl*	*ucl*	*Species*	*Sample*	*Change 04–05*	*Change 94–05*		*lcl*	*ucl*
Mallard	87	11	15		-10	47	**Song Thrush**	138	5	26	*	5	51
Red Grouse	54	-9	-19		-43	14	*Mistle Thrush*	62	-5	69	*	23	133
Pheasant	104	-12	-10		-26	9	Sedge Warbler	47	10	22		-10	64
(Grey Heron)	44	-8	87	*	22	186	Blackcap	33	23	134	*	49	268
Buzzard	106	-7	50	*	17	91	Whitethroat	60	1	89	*	38	159
Kestrel	41	-15	-48	*	-65	-24	*Willow Warbler*	174	0	40	*	23	60
Oystercatcher	117	-9	-22	*	-33	-9	*Goldcrest*	74	5	155	*	97	229
Golden Plover	41	-6	-13		-38	20	Blue Tit	127	-1	38	*	17	63
Lapwing	84	-20	-48	*	-58	-36	Great Tit	113	-1	58	*	29	94
Snipe	52	-6	58	*	18	112	Coal Tit	100	29	44	*	19	73
Curlew	118	-9	-48	*	-56	-39	Magpie	35	-20	31		-7	85
Common Sandpiper	33	17	-4		-31	35	Jackdaw	93	4	10		-12	38
Feral Pigeon	53	14	21		-13	67	Rook	97	-4	-9		-31	21
Wood Pigeon	162	13	-4		-16	10	Carrion Crow	153	-6	-8		-23	10
Collared Dove	38	20	13		-19	57	Hooded Crow	49	0	-37	*	-53	-16
Cuckoo	64	-15	30		-2	71	Raven	37	-23	49		-6	135
Swift	43	40	-34	*	-52	-9	**Starling**	126	48	33	*	5	67
Skylark	184	-8	-5		-15	6	**House Sparrow**	75	11	47	*	19	82
Swallow	138	10	24	*	6	46	Chaffinch	195	7	6		-4	17
House Martin	47	-2	166	*	69	320	Greenfinch	85	-23	3		-20	33
Meadow Pipit	191	-14	-18	*	-26	-9	Goldfinch	67	5	57	*	10	124
Pied Wagtail	116	-8	14		-8	40	Siskin	54	57	-6		-31	28
Wren	183	6	97	*	72	125	**Linnet**	80	51	31	*	1	68
Dunnock	107	25	49	*	19	86	*Lesser Redpoll*	36	82	49	*	3	116
Robin	156	15	17	*	2	33	**Bullfinch**	30	-8	50		-11	153
Wheatear	72	-16	-6		-27	21	**Yellowhammer**	87	13	3		-15	24
Blackbird	153	4	13	*	1	28	**Reed Bunting**	43	35	36		-2	90

Scottish Bird News No 81 Sept 2006

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Jimmy Maxwell
Ian Francis

Assisted by
Kate Walshaw
Jean Torrance

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Contributions for the next issue of *SBN* should be submitted not later than 24th October 2006 to:

***SBN* Editor, SOC, The Scottish Birdwatching Resource Centre, Waterston House, Aberlady, East Lothian EH32 0PY.**

Articles can be sent on disc or by e-mail (mail@the-soc.org.uk), although we do still accept typed or handwritten material.

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NEWS & NOTICES

200 Club

The latest prizewinners are – **May: 1st** £30 T. Hartland, **2nd** £20 Prof. D. Jenkins, **3rd** £10 Mrs. E. Palmar. **June: 1st** £30 R.J. Young, **2nd** £20 R.S. Smith, **3rd** £10 Mrs. M. Lennox **July: 1st** £30 Mrs. A. Beggs, **2nd** £20 Dr. W.M. Morrison, **3rd** £10 J.H. Ballantyne

I would like to thank all members who changed their Banker's Orders and apologise for any inconvenience caused. ***Daphne Peirse-Duncombe at Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9NH.***

Rainbows visit to Waterston House

On a warm sunny evening on 1st June, the local Rainbow group of 20 girls aged 6–8, came to visit us at Waterston House. I had been in all afternoon preparing several bird-related games for them. I decided that all the games would feature birds of four groups which are seen around Aberlady, namely - waders, raptors, ducks/geese and small garden birds. I chose 4 species in each group and wrote out the letters on separate pieces of paper which I then placed around the garden and foyer. The girls were split into 4 teams and given 4 names. They then ran around looking for the right letters, collecting them and bringing them back to one of the leaders to check they had all the letters needed. The wind caused a wee bit of havoc but most of the letters were eventually collected. I then explained a bit about the 4 groups and what they had in common, featuring bills and legs in particular. (I had drawn pictures of all the birds) The next game involved distributing the birds to the correct group , one in each corner of the room where a leader was in charge. There was much giggling and to-and-froing but finally they made up their minds. We looked at each group again and chatted about why the birds were in that group. On the whole, the girls did pretty well.

Next they sat down on the floor for juice and biscuits while I showed them a power point presentation of Aberlady Bay which Ian Thomson had set up for me. Amazingly enough, most of the birds we had been using in the games came up on the screen, so it complemented my games well. The girls all seemed to enjoy the evening and the leaders said they had learned lots of new things about birds too. While we were lucky with the weather staying nice and sunny, I had forgotten just how exhausting it was, keeping twenty children amused for an hour and a half!

Janet Crummy

The Apprentice

We all have memories of our beginnings . . . call it coincidence, fate, kismet or what you will, yet often an unseen or forgotten hand did move within our life which changed us.

During the last months of John L. Burton's life in the Ayrshire Hospice we talked a lot about his early birding days as a schoolboy.

After his death on the 4th of July this year it began to dawn on me that the SOC could perhaps benefit from his recollections. With the help of his wife, Jean, and Arthur Stevens, a contemporary of his youth, I believe that there is a tale to tell and a lesson to be learned.

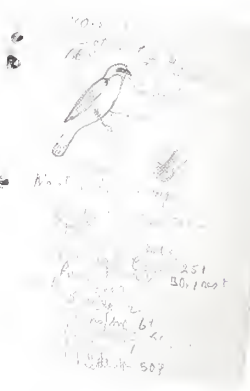
Enthusiasts young and old

John at the age of 12 in 1950 became a founder member of the Nuneaton Bird Club. How did that come about?

There were at that time a couple of very keen birders in the town, Harold Lapworth and Alban Wincott who were RSPB members and enthusiastic participants in the renowned Leicestershire and Rutland Ornithological Society.

The catalyst however was probably Jean Lapworth the sister of Harold, who was a young teacher in the school attended by John Wagstaff and John Burton. Arthur Stevens told me that the inaugural meeting of the Nuneaton Bird Club, although at another school, was attended by the youngsters as a result of her nurture and encouragement.

Thus it was that boys of 12 and 13 found themselves apprenticed to real Birders and their membership of the Junior Bird Recorders Club took on real meaning, so much so that in 1953, JLB was awarded with merit for recording the first nesting Hobby in Leicestershire, the prize being a copy of the Fitter



Careful notes in the days when Red-backed Shrikes were still around

Richardson (Collins) Field Guide. Before too long, the boys were off to bird trips further afield with adventures to Speyside and pilgrimage to Norfolk, leading them to meet the Masters - George Waterston and Richard Richardson!

When John Burton's career brought him to Scotland, the Ayr Branch of the SOC gained an immensely expert enthusiast, who in his very gentle way helped the development of younger birders in South West Scotland too numerous to mention, who will swiftly acknowledge the benefit of his mentorship.

The fieldcraft skills in Atlas work, Surveys and Censuses which the old JBRC inculcated were criticised by some as rather dry and serious, but I believe that those who would be birders as boys and girls actually want to be taken seriously and are willing to be apprenticed.

Year after year come November, in some evening corner of the SOC annual Conference, you would find two or three gathered together talking in guarded and conspiratorial tones about "How can we help the young Unknowns that would be Birders?" Not by creating fun events for lots of children, but rather including the few who already have the interest in the field work which so many SOC members participate in anyway. The Scottish Ornithologists' Club, we, as a Charity, have an obligation to the youth of today to play our part in symbiotic alliance with the RSPB, SWT *et al.* to provide the local expertise as Journeymen willing to transmit the mysteries of our Craft to maybe only a few young wayfarers who would benefit.

In nature, symbiosis often functions through invisible threads... good fortune gave JLB a teacher who knew how to tug upon just such a thread. Perhaps simply by quietly letting your local School or a Scout/Guide Group know that the SOC exists "pro bono publico" - the Tapestry of conservation may gain some new vibrant colours. That new gem-like thread might be another John Burton.

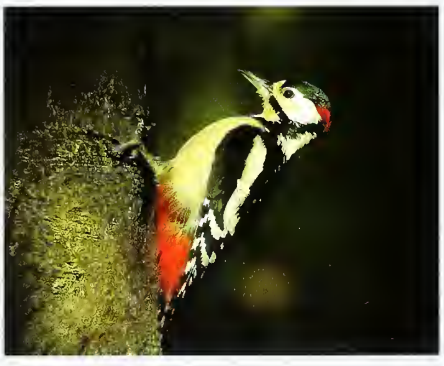
Duncan M Watt

John Burton was a long-standing and active member of Ayrshire SOC.

Photo Successes

In the Digiscoping Competition featured in the magazine "*Bird Watching*" this year and judged by film-maker, Chris Packham, these SOC members were placed as follows: One of 3 **Runners-up** – Lang Stewart; Fieldfare. **Commended** – Jimmy Maxwell; Goldfinch. **Commended** - Lang Stewart; Great spotted Woodpecker.

Our hearty congratulations for their success in this new Competition based on digiscoping, the combination of telescope and digital camera.



Scottish Raptor Study Groups

Birds of Prey or "Raptors" form a unique part of our natural heritage in Scotland and provide tremendous pleasure to countless thousands of visitors to the countryside as well as to local communities. It has only recently been recognised that species such as Osprey and White-tailed Eagle can generate millions of pounds in eco-tourism related income. However, and despite legal protection for over 50 years, raptors continue to be persecuted and also remain at risk to egg collectors. Scottish Raptor Study Groups (SRSGs) are dedicated to the monitoring and conservation of raptors.

Historically, the conservation and protection of raptors has been dependent on the commitment of dedicated individuals who unstintingly gave of their time and energy studying behaviour and monitoring breeding performance. The longest known studies for Golden Eagles are in Galloway and Deeside where populations have been monitored for 60 years. Similar studies in Skye and Argyll have lasted over 30 years. These have been critically important for informing the policy decisions of statutory organisations, in particular Scottish Natural Heritage, as well as the work of conservation organisations such as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. The re-colonisation of the Osprey and the re-introduction of the White-tailed Eagle and Red Kite would not have been possible without the dedicated and selfless work of individuals, many of whom have formed the core membership of Raptor Groups.

The first Raptor Study Groups were formed over 25 years ago in response to the need to improve co-ordination in monitoring of Golden Eagle and Peregrine populations in the Highlands and North-East Scotland. Since then the number of Groups has grown to ten covering most of Scotland. There are now over 230 members of Groups involved in both individual and co-ordinated studies on all diurnal raptors breeding in Scotland as well as Owls and Ravens.

In 2002 the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme Agreement was launched, a partnership between SRSGs, SNH, JNCC, RSPB Scotland, BTO Scotland, the SOC and the Rare Breeding Birds Panel. This resulted in the appointment of Brian Etheridge as part time Raptor Monitoring Officer, whose main function is to assist in the co-ordination of the work of Groups and to produce a publicly available annual report.

Raptor workers are often accused of being secretive about their work, and given the long history of persecution, and some of the 'modern' problems of site disturbance, this is probably understandable. Members of SRSGs also recognise the importance of improving the awareness of their work and increasing access to it. With this in mind, a web site has recently been launched – http://www.scottishraptorgroups.org. The site contains details and a contact point for the ten Area Groups as well as species accounts contributed by individual Group members of the 19 different raptors currently studied. The site also contains details of the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme as well as pages on Persecution

Osprey in action *(David Whitaker)*

with useful information on Wildlife Crime. There are News and Publications pages as well as the usual links. The site is enhanced by superb images of raptors, many of which were taken by Raptor Group members.

Bob McMillan (Web Site Co-ordinator)

Patrick Watt Sandeman - the last of the first

It was a beautiful spring day, calm, with the blue sky reflecting off the snowy corries below the peaks of Ben Lawers and Ben More when Pat was laid to rest in Balquhidder; just the day, Pat would have thought, for going to the hills.

Pat was the last surviving member of the group, including his elder brother, Gerard (obituary *Scottish Birds SB* 21(1) 2000), and George Waterston, which formed the Scottish Ornithologists' Club in 1936. He was born in Edinburgh, the youngest of five children, and attended George Watson's College. He never knew his mother, who died giving birth to him; but his father remarried and had four more children.

Pat remembered seeing Zeppelins flying over Edinburgh during the first World War and later thought it wonderful to see soldiers doing bayonet practice on the Meadows. However war itself proved altogether a different experience, one which was to affect him deeply through the rest of his life. He served with the Royal Artillery from the start of the war, surviving the evacuation of Dunkirk, the Normandy landings on D-Day, and the long battle through East Holland to the end of the war in Germany, where his administration of Stadt Lohne earned the grateful appreciation of the burgermeister. After the war he rejoined the family whisky business in Edinburgh.

It was during training camp in Devon that he met Mary whom he married in 1941. She predeceased him by seven years and he died on their 65th wedding anniversary on 24th April 2006, after a fall in his own home.

They had two children. David, his engineer son, died tragically by drowning in Loch Tay at the age of 25 in an accident with a light 'plane. His daughter, Mary, became a celebrated singer in both English and Gaelic, and lives in the cottage beside Loch Tay.

Despite his Edinburgh background, Pat's heart was always in the Highlands. His father took him often to Tayside as a boy, and he retained a close connection with that area ever after. He learnt the Gaelic, and took up piping. The story goes that he went up to Edinburgh Castle to ask Pipe Major

Pat in Glen Lyon *(David Merrie)*

Willie Ross, who was head of piping there, if he could teach him. Willie Ross said "I've no time for you, 'cos the taxman is after me." Then, when Pat was leaving he asked "What do you do, boy", and when Pat said "I'm in the whisky business", he replied "That's good, boy. I might have a place for you, but I don't want to be paid in cash."

Through his love of piping he met Pipe Major George Stoddart and with him formed the Eagle Pipers Society which met at the Eagle Bar on the High Street, Edinburgh, and from then he developed a circle of piping friends from all over Scotland.

Pat was passionate about all he did, but never more so than his lifelong studies of birds of prey. At one time Pat reckoned he knew the location of every breeding pair of Golden Eagles in Scotland. Daughter Mary remembers a wall in their Edinburgh home covered with Ordnance Survey One Inch maps joined together, and covered with pins of different colours for breeding, probable breeding and sightings. He would have shared many a crack and a glass or two with the likes of Leslie Brown and Charlie Palmar as they surveyed maps strewn over the floor with half crowns thrown down to mark the distribution of eagle home ranges; and he corresponded with Lea McNally and Derek Ratcliffe.

He was a conservationist long before that word was coined in its modern usage. From 1931 he kept a scrapbook of press-cuttings covering Edinburgh, the Highlands, the War, and natural history, notably of persecution of Golden Eagles and sightings of Ospreys from 1934 onwards.

In the 1950s he was one of the Bird Boys who made use of the skills learned in the war to mount surveillance on the pair of Ospreys nesting in Rothiemurchus in 1958/9. This was a top secret operation. The threat to birds with a hooked beak from gamekeepers was receding, only to be replaced by a greater threat from egg collectors, among whom were one or two noted naturalists. Twenty years before the RSPB commenced the programme which resulted in successful reintroduction of the Sea Eagle to Scotland, Pat at his own expense procured three immature Sea Eagles from Norway, and released them in Glen Etive. Charlie Palmar recorded the release on film. They were never seen again.

He pioneered the provision of nest boxes for Goldeneye, which have now become established breeders on highland lochs.

Pat was honoured for his efforts by the RSPB with presentation of their Silver Medal in 1956, and election as Fellow in 1987. He was a great supporter of the Scottish Wildlife Trust and was for a time Chairman of the Central Region.

He was known to thousands of readers of the Scots Magazine as "my friend Pat" in Tom Weir's "My Month" articles. The friendship with Tom helped to ease the pain of David's death, but later he became as a father to his two grandsons, counselling them and ensuring they had all the training and opportunity for their respective careers.

Although he claimed to be dyslexic he was an avid reader and corresponded widely with pipers, gaelic speakers and ornithologists. He kept a note of birds seen on all his outings, which he latterly sent regularly to the Central region SOC recorder. He left behind an exercise book with sightings up to three weeks before his fall.

Pat was delighted, when in his 90th year he discovered a pair of Ospreys breeding on Loch Tayside only a few miles from his home.

Pat was fiercely independent to the last, always keen to get outdoors at least once a day, and in his last years his electric buggy was a familiar sight passing through Killin or going to the shore of Loch Tay. He was stoutly suspicious of anything new, like computers and mobile 'phones, but quick to take advantage of someone else's use of them. He was a great believer in homeopathic cures, and these or the belief in their efficacy helped to keep him in good health up to his 90s.

He was resolute in all he did, a source of inspiration and support for many. He was brought up in the age of the gentleman ornithologist, and he remained an ornithologist and conservationist of note, and a gentleman to the end, in this era when gentlemanliship is somewhat out of fashion. But then, it was passion, not fashion, that made Pat what he was.

David Merrie

BBS in Scotland

- cont. from P2

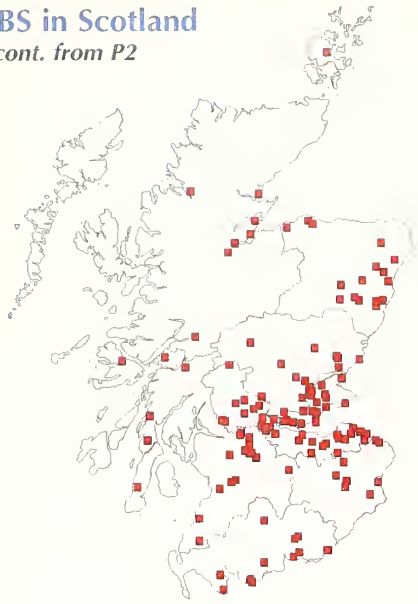


Figure 4. *BBS data is revealing some interesting distribution patterns for some species. This map shows the BBS squares where Blackcap has been recorded in Scotland since 1994. It clearly shows that this species is concentrated in the central belt, with amber squares denoting where blackcap have been recorded at least once during 1994–2005 and red squares where an average of one or more individuals have been noted each year. None have yet been recorded in Shetland.*

Meadow Pipit: Numbers of Meadow Pipit, one of Scotland's most abundant birds and the archetypal species of open moorland, have declined by 18% since 1994. Similar declines have been reported in northern England. Meadow Pipits are partial migrants and conditions on the Iberian wintering grounds have been linked to declines in the UK, as have losses of marginal land from parts of the breeding range.

Meadow Pipit *(Harry Scott)*

Hooded Crow: The latest BBS results show that numbers of Hooded Crow have declined by 37% in Scotland since 1994. This species was only separated from the Carrion Crow in 2002, and occurs within the UK only in Scotland (primarily north of the Great Glen) and in Northern Ireland, where in contrast, numbers have increased significantly over the same period. A contraction in the Hooded Crow range (particularly in Moray & Nairn) and an expansion of that for Carrion Crow were recorded between the two breeding bird atlas periods of the early 1970s and 1990s. A narrow band of hybrid birds occurs where these two species meet, and this band has moved by some 20 miles in a north-westerly direction over this period.

What is involved in taking part in BBS?
The survey involves just 5–6 hours of fieldwork each year for each square (there is no limit to the number of squares you can take on!). Two visits are made to your randomly selected 1km grid square each breeding season (early April to early July) to count all the birds you see and hear along a 2km route within that square.

What skills are required?
You need to have a reasonable knowledge of the songs and calls of common birds in your local area. You DO NOT need to know every call of every species! A free CD or cassette containing the songs and calls of the more difficult to identify species is available to all new volunteers on request. Those less confident in their woodland species identification may prefer to consider an upland site as they generally have fewer, but more visible species. Upland CDs and cassettes are also available.

What do you get out of this survey?
In addition to receiving a free CD of bird songs and calls, you will be able to make a valuable contribution towards an important national project, the results for which are increasingly being used by non-Government and Government Agencies to set their conservation priorities for bird species. The BBS also allows you to monitor a site over a number of years, giving you a fascinating insight into the changing numbers of birds on your patch!

BBS-Online
BBS observers can now enter their bird count data electronically via the web (www.bto.org/bbs). The system also allows the user to view counts from previous years, giving the observer a picture of how the numbers of each species have changed on their site. If you

Hooded Crow *(Linda Baillie)*

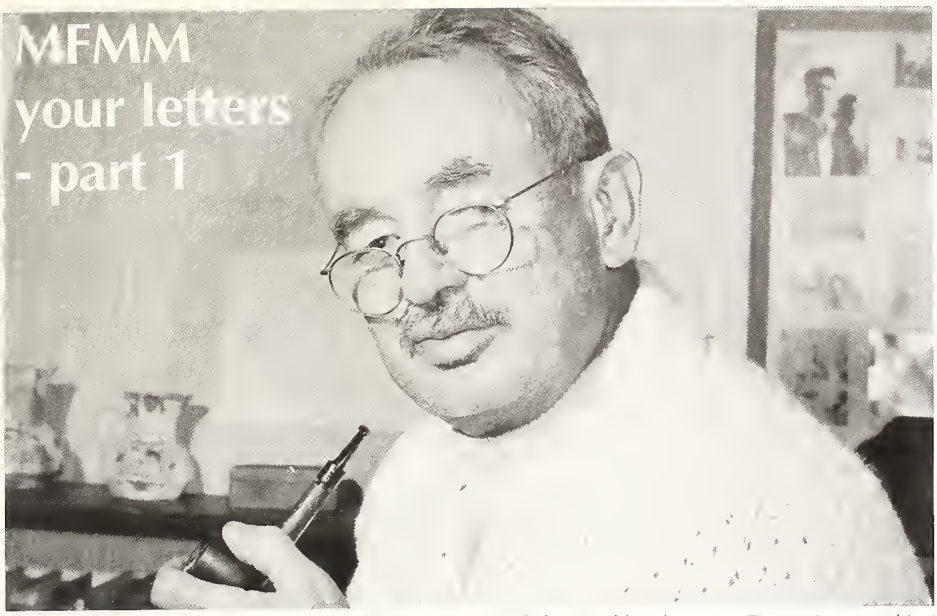
do not have internet facilities, do not be put off; all bird counts can still be submitted on the usual paper forms and you will receive a free copy of the BBS report each year.

For more information about the BBS including species distribution maps, population trends and species lists, please visit the website: www.bto.org/bbs, or contact your Regional Organiser or Jacqui Kaye at BTO Scotland (email: scotlandbbs@bto.org, tel: 01786 466560).

The BTO is indebted to the network of voluntary Regional Representatives for their invaluable work in organising BBS, as follows: Aberdeen (John Littlejohn); Angus (Ken Slater); Argyll South, Bute & Gigha (Richard Allan); Argyll North, Mull, Coll, Tiree & Morvern (Sue Dewar); Ayrshire (Brian Broadley); Benbecula & the Uists (Brian Rabbitts); Borders (Steve Hunt); Caithness (Donald Omand); Central (Neil Bielby); Dumfries (Edmund Fellowes); Fife (Norman Elkins); Inverness-shire (Hugh Insley); Islay, Jura & Colonsay (Malcolm Ogilvie); Kincardine (Graham Cooper); Kirkcudbright (Andrew Bielinski); Lanark, Renfrew & Dunbarton (John Knowler); Lewis & Harris (Chris Reynolds); Lothian (Alan Heavisides); Moray & Nairn (Bob Proctor); Orkney (Colin Corse); Perthshire (Richard Paul); Ross-shire (Simon Cohen); Shetland (Dave Okill); Skye (Bob McMillan); Rum, Eigg, Muck, Canna (Bob Swann); Sutherland (David Devonport); Wigtown (Geoff Sheppard).

The BBS is organised by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), and jointly funded by BTO, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC, on behalf of Scottish Natural Heritage, English Nature, Countryside Council for Wales and the Environment and Heritage Service in Northern Ireland) and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB).

MFMM your letters - part 1



Maury Meiklejohn *(Image courtesy of The Herald and Evening Times picture archive)*

Since* SBN *80 when we featured the Scottish ornithologist Maury Meiklejohn, several pieces have come in from members adding to the list of memories of this great man. We're grateful for these contributions which now appear below in two separate parts

Frank Hamilton;

1. When on the Isle of May with Maury in the mid -1950s, he told me that some months earlier he had been out and taken a windup gramophone and two records. One was classical and the other jazz (Louis Armstrong I remember) He wanted to know which attracted the seals most! He took the machine to the North Ness and played the records. In a sad voice he told me they couldn't tell the difference - coming close whatever he played.

2. He lived in a flat in Glasgow and told me there were mice in it and that his landlady hated them. She used to put out traps, baited with cheese, in his room. Maury hated killing things and he used to take the cheese out of the trap and feed it to the mouse. He said he used to sit on one side of the fireplace and the mouse at the other eating the cheese. This went on for a long time until one evening the landlady came in unexpectedly and caught him and the mouse and nearly threw him out of the house. He told me this story and ended up, as all his stories end, with him giving a characteristic little chuckle.

3. The SOC was having its monthly meeting somewhere at the east end of Princes Street in the mid 1950s and the Chairman said Maury had something important to demonstrate.

Maury came forward with a wooden orange box, one end of which was held open with string. He announced in his slow dry way that this was to catch a Hoodwink (this was a mythical bird Maury had created and written widely about - the bird that everyone sees but can't identify!). He stood the box on the table in the front and said "to attract the Hoodwink in you bait the inside of the box with beer bottle tops. Once the bird goes in you let the lid down" At this point he slowly, and with difficulty, pulled the string along the top, the lid at one end lowered but another opened up at the other end! He looked at the audience and said "This is to give the bird a sporting chance"

Michael Thomas (professor);

My first visit to the Cley Marshes was in 1950. I was a sixth former in Birmingham, and three of us went to the mecca of British ornithology, full of expectations. I remember three events as if they were yesterday. Our twitch was a Pectoral Sandpiper. I spent two hours in a hide sitting next to Richard Richardson, a real education. Finally, that interesting fellow who sat on his own at the breakfast table of the George, consuming 3"x 5" index cards. By day three, I had to find out what was going on. I approached the great man [he looked like a Professor-I don't think I ever did!!]. and enquired as to the nature of the activity. 'Working on my Italian dictionary' was MFMM's reply.

W.A.J. (Peter) Cunningham;

There was only one empty seat left for the talk at my first Scottish Ornithologists' Club Conference, next to a tramp. Coming from the Isle of Lewis, I knew none of the members except George Waterston and I had a good mind to speak to him about the eclectic nature of its membership. It was not long, however, before I realised that Shakespeare was sometimes mistaken in his claim that "the apparel oft proclaims the man" and that I was sitting beside a very remarkable person, no less than a Professor of Italian at Glasgow University and yet of a winsome, friendly nature.

The Outer Hebrides were apparently beyond his normal bird watching activities and he welcomed the notion of a correspondent in *ultima thule* and during the ensuing years until his untimely death he visited me in Stornoway on numerous occasions, bringing me a bottle of his favourite Italian wine, *Valpolicella,* or his favourite cheese; *Bel Paese,* I think it was called.

On one of his first visits on a weekend, he proposed to walk on the Sunday to the Butt of Lewis, which he typically portrayed as "a poor old soul, the target of local ridicule". I suggested that, after the morning Church Service, I would pick him up half way with my car and take him the rest of the way.

I recommended that he proceed across the moor by the Barvas River where the birdlife might be more varied. When I eventually caught up with him he reported that he had found the road easier and made pejorative comments on the 1754 empty bottles he counted by the twelve miles of roadside. I hastened to account for their presence as containers for milk brought by people cutting peat for their frequent breaks for tea and begged him not to mention his suspicions in his weekly column in the *Glasgow Herald* .

On the 15th June 1960 I found the first Collared Dove for the west of Scotland. The previous Scottish record in Morayshire having eluded Maury, he later came to Lewis in search for a new bird for him. He found one near Stornoway but characteristically accepted that mine was further west than his.

Similarly, he turned up one year in response to my report of a sighting of a Long-tailed Skua on the local breeding grounds of Great and Arctic Skuas. We did not find it of course and I took him to look for one of our Peregrines. As we returned along the coastal road with a steep drop to the sea on his side, he evinced some concern as to his safety. It transpired that he was scared of heights and I was careful thereafter where I took him.

The aeroplane in which he was to return to Glasgow on 21st November 1966 was late and we went to the Braighe to check the freshwater loch on the isthmus there for wildfowl. A Redshank, well named by the Gaels as the warden of the shore, got up followed by a smaller wader. With a shout of "White-rumped Sandpiper", he was out of the car and over the fence faster than a ten year old. It was the first for the Outer Hebrides and the fourth for Scotland!

It was a constant source of joy and learning to be in his company and I have never since judged a birdwatcher by his gear.

Continued page 14

The Nuthatch in Lothian

The first records of Nuthatches breeding in Scotland were in 1989, at The Hirsel and at Floors in Borders Region, both just a step across the border from England. This was heralded in the preceding three years by sporadic sightings near the border. Colonisation had seemed almost inevitable because Nuthatches had spread steadily northwards through Northumberland and Cumbria over the preceding two decades. The subsequent emergence of significant breeding populations in the Scottish Borders and Dumfries & Galloway, and the species' spread northwards till 2004, have been covered by Jimmy Maxwell in two comprehensive articles in *SBN* 71 and 72, and since then breeding pairs have been confirmed in Ayrshire in 2004, and in Clyde in 2005.

Colonisation

In Lothian, the earliest record was of a Nuthatch at Herdmanston in 1865. One hundred and twenty years later, the second sighting occurred at the Gosford Estate, also in East Lothian. Then in 1998 and 1999, sightings occurred at Balerno (Midlothian), The Meadows (Edinburgh), Dunglass (E Lothian / Borders coast) and Haddington (E Lothian) along with several unconfirmed reports. A sense of excitement accompanied this sudden activity, which mirrored that seen in the Borders immediately preceding the first confirmed breeding reports. But in 2000 and 2001 there were no records at all of Nuthatches in Lothian – the advance seemed to have stalled! Of interest is that the same phenomenon occurred in Fife, where sightings had occurred in each of 1997, 1998, and 1999, after which there were no records for six years.

A single sighting in Edinburgh in 2002 was followed by an upsurge of activity, with reports from Vogrie (two birds) and Dalkeith Country Parks, both Midlothian, in 2003. In 2004, birds were again seen at Vogrie, and breeding was suspected at that site but not confirmed. Significantly, a cluster of reports occurred at a hotspot area of East Lothian at Bielhill, Pitcox, Whittinghame and Smeaton (pair), suggesting that colonisation was occurring. The first West Lothian sighting was at Torphichen that year, and the second at Bathgate in 2005.

2005 and 2006: First breeding in Lothian

2005 was a landmark year for the species in East Lothian. A nest site was discovered by SOC members Noreen and Mike Stabler at Smeaton, E Lothian, confirming the Nuthatch as a breeding species. Young were successfully reared. In June 2005, while photographing Treecreepers in Roslin Glen, Midlothian, I was lucky to find two Nuthatches. The behaviour was of an adult feeding a juvenile, although the latter bird was not well seen. Although not confirmed, this sighting strongly suggested that the species also bred in Midlothian that year. In 2006, the Smeaton pair bred again, a Nuthatch was sighted further up the North Esk valley at Penicuik House, and I kept an eye out for the Roslin Glen pair in the hope that breeding would occur.

Revisiting early in 2006, Nuthatch calls could be heard in the same area of Roslin Glen. A nest site was found in the typical situation of a disused woodpecker hole high up in the trunk of a dead tree. The hole was approximately 18 feet above ground level. (This site was also found by another Lothian birder, Mike Thrower, who had been monitoring these birds over winter 2005 independently). A female Nuthatch busied herself plastering up a woodpecker hole with mud scooped from woodland paths and the riverbank. During this period the male loudly announced the territory with his trilling call. It took several weeks for the nest-hole circumference to be narrowed down to be just large enough to accommodate the species. The female was often totally covered in mud from her trips. The work was ceaseless, and I obtained video of their activity from then until fledging time, by leaving a camcorder running near the nest site.

Nest building continued until around 20th April, after which there was almost always one Nuthatch in the nest hole. The young probably hatched around May 12th as there was a sudden increase in activity with food being brought into the nest at 3–4 minute intervals. The feeding frequency increased over the next fortnight and the maximum recorded feed frequency was 32 visits in 30 minutes, with both birds shuttling furiously to bring in caterpillars, insects and fragments of nut, presumably from a garden feeder.

On day 19 (from hatching) the female Nuthatch started to lay food at the nest entrance and on day 20 the first views of a juvenile were had. At any time only one or two juveniles could be seen at the narrow nest hole, although more may have been in the nest (Nuthatches can lay up to 8 eggs). On day 21 the juveniles came up to the nest hole to be fed, and from then on views were excellent. The first juvenile probably fledged early day 26 as a very confident juvenile was filmed practically out of the nest on day 25 and was gone the next morning. The nest site was totally deserted from day 27. Up to five Nuthatches were subsequently seen in a country house garden nearby, on feeders and adjacent trees.

Beginning the hole reduction with mud *(Neil Grubb)*

The new reduced opening *(Neil Grubb)*

Corridors of spread?

BTO ringing records suggest the Nuthatch is sedentary, moving an average of 1km and rarely more than 10km from ringing sites. Exceptionally, birds will travel further but generally they occupy territories adjacent to those in which they fledged. The Lammermuir and Moorfoot Hills at first sight seem significant barriers to the spread of the species from Borders to Lothian. So how did they get into Lothian? It could be speculated that the East Lothian cluster arose from spread east of the Lammermuirs along coastal lowland from Borders Region, borne out by 1997 reports of birds at St Abbs, Pease Dean and other coastal sites. Also, the Moorfoots may not constitute such a major barrier when it is considered that the Esk and Tyne river systems (Vogrie and Roslin birds) and the Heriot / Gala and Eddleston Waters (which feed into Tweeddale, the stronghold of the Borders population) all draw from these hills. A comparatively small (less that 5km in places) band of treeless land separates them. Midlothian birds may thus have travelled along river woodland corridors subtending the Moorfoots. Birds higher up the Tweed river system at Peebles, Lauder and Stow in the late 1990s could have seeded these sites.

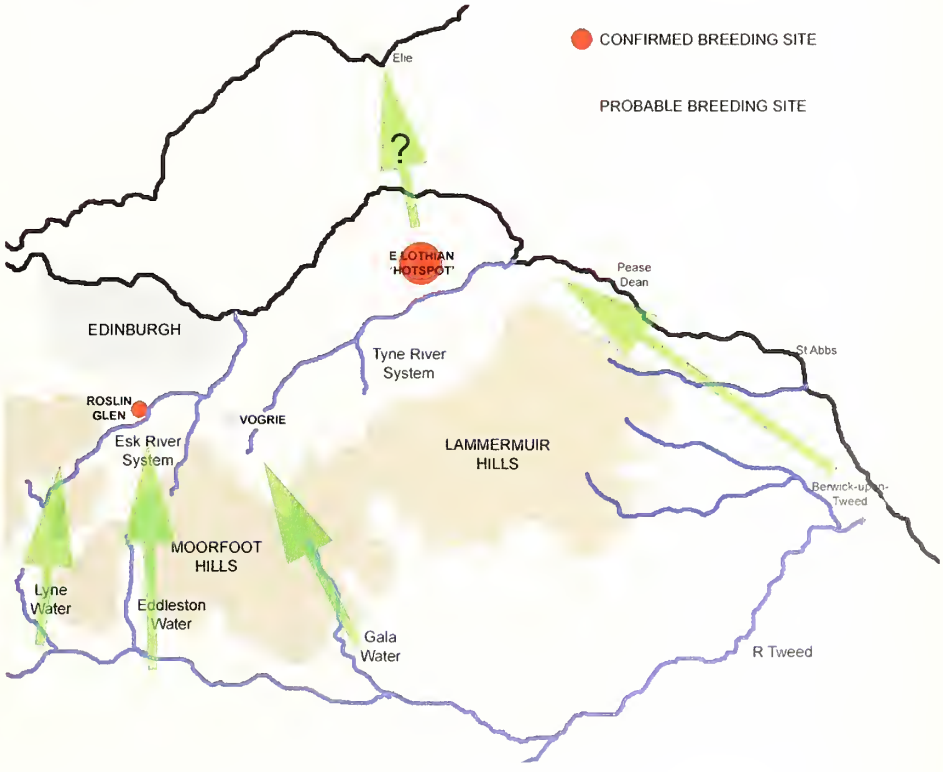
The future

It is interesting to speculate on possible reasons for the northward advance of Nuthatches in Britain. Met Office data show that for Edinburgh the mean July temperature was 14.4°C between 1951 and 1980, rising to 15.1–15.8°C in 1995–6, and a record 17.8°C in 2006. *Birds of the Western Palearctic* cites summer temperature as an important factor in the distribution of the species, which breeds "from warm temperate to cooler boreal climates within July isotherms 16–27°C". Nuthatch colonisation has occurred around the time that the mean July temperature tripped the lower end of this range. Climate change and rising mean summer temperatures may thus have an important bearing on breeding populations. Colonisation is almost certainly not simply a function of higher temperature (continental birds are able to thrive in countries with much colder winters than Scotland) but other related factors such as food availability and drier winters may be relevant.

The future progress of this species will be interesting to watch. The first Fife sighting in six years was at Kincraig Hill near Elie in May 2005. Elie is first landfall for a Nuthatch flying across the Firth of Forth from the East Lothian hotspot... could this have been a Lindbergh of the Nuthatch world?! Notwithstanding, the confirmation of Lothian breeding sites is likely to herald further expansion into Fife, Perth and Kinross, Forth Valley and Tayside, where sporadic sightings have already been reported since 2000.

Neil Grubb

Figure 1. *South-east Scotland*



SOC Research Grants - what's the catch?

Two years ago (*SBN* 72, June 2004) publicity was given about SOC Research Grants, in an attempt to increase the number of applications every year.

Surprisingly, perhaps, ornithologists (Scottish or otherwise) have been slow on the uptake. Lots of you, I know, undertake projects on Scottish birds for your own interest or as part of a group; and you study either a single species, or a particular species group (e.g waders, pipits & wagtails, warblers), or habitat, site, or even region.

If this involves you in some extra-ordinary expense, why not let the SOC help you out? THERE IS NO CATCH! Basically all you have to do is to let us know by 31st January about your study or proposed study, how much financial assistance you require, and for what purpose. To make it easy for you, an information leaflet and application form are available from SOC HQ. Each year around £1500 is available for disbursement. Use it, or lose it!

Eligible projects must relate to the study of Scottish birds, and applications are assessed for funding (by the Research & Surveys Committee) according to their ornithological merit and the likelihood of the objectives being met. SOC Research Grants should be viewed as sources of extra reasonable funding for expenses incurred for travel or accommodation or particular equipment.

Below are some recent examples of how grants have helped projects on Scottish birds (see also *SBN* 78, Dec. 2005 for an account of Purple Sandpiper studies in Iceland) – if you think your investigation merits support, then please apply.

Tom Dougall for Research & Surveys Committee (currently Michael Bell, Thomas Daniels, Tom Dougall, Raymond Duncan, Norman Elkins, Les Hatton and Mark Holling).

Monitoring Handa's skua populations

Since the 1960s, Great and Arctic Skuas have been expanding their breeding range to the south and west from their traditional Orkney and Shetland stronghold. Two Great Skua colonies in particular off the west coast of Scotland have grown to significant numbers: St. Kilda and Handa. Less famous than St. Kilda, Handa is nevertheless a spectacular seabird island off the coast of Sutherland, managed by the Scottish Wildlife Trust. As well as Arctic Skuas and Bonxies, Handa has the largest Common Guillemot colony and the second largest Razorbill colony in Britain and Ireland. In 2003, with the help of a grant from the SOC, we began annual intensive monitoring of the breeding performance and diet of Handa's skuas.

In 2003, we monitored the success of every breeding pair on the island: 202 pairs of Arctic Skua, and 33 pairs of Bonxies. Since 2004, we have monitored a minimum of 60 Bonxie pairs, and all of the breeding Arctics. Every nest is located soon after the eggs have been laid, marked with a bamboo cane 5m from the nest, coded and recorded using GPS. Regular visits to each nest ensue throughout the rest of the season, until the outcome of each breeding is known. Chicks are ringed and regularly weighed to monitor condition. Bonxies fledge at around 49 days; we assume a chick to be 'fledged' if it is still present and healthy after 42 days. In the case of the Arctics, monitoring continues for up to three weeks after fledging, as the new fliers hang around their natal territory during this time and suffer heavy losses from predating Bonxies. We also study Bonxie diet through the analysis of regurgitated pellets collected at regular intervals throughout the season along 2 transects which pass through 25 breeding territories, and through regular sweeps of the non-breeders' "club" site. Between 2003 and 2005 we collected 3918 pellets.

Great Skua's egg hatching on Handa (T. Jones)

Our results to date have shown that Handa is a productive Great Skua colony, albeit with some inter-annual variation in breeding success. Predation of chicks by other Bonxies, as well as by Great Black-backed Gulls, has a significant impact on Bonxie productivity. The Arctic Skua colony meanwhile is under great pressure from the neighbouring Bonxies, and is currently declining rapidly. On diet, we have found that over 50% of Bonxie diet is comprised of other birds, and it is especially critical that we continue to monitor and analyse Bonxie feeding ecology in relation to their impact on Handa's globally important auk colonies.

This ongoing monitoring programme has been made possible with help from the SOC, SNH, SWT and The Seabird Group. We are also indebted to the volunteers of Handa and members of the Highland Ringing Group for their valuable assistance in the field.

Trevor Jones, Claire Smith & Andrew Ramsay

Handa Island Skua Monitoring Programme Annual reports available from T. Jones: tembomkubwa@gmail.com Check our website: www.handaskuas.org

The cliffs on Handa (Andrew Miller)

Autumn passage of White Wagtails in Lanarkshire

Many projects start with a clear aim, action plans and perhaps a predictable end. The White Wagtail project however is anything but this. It started by accident, has developed rapidly into a national, now international, study and is far from its end!

During the late summer of 1999, I became increasingly aware of large numbers of Pied Wagtails (*Motacilla alba yarelli*) gathering at a pre-roost site in Strathclyde Country Park, Motherwell, N Lanarkshire. I had only previously ringed very small numbers in the Park, so was keen to catch some more. As we made plans, we discussed the possibility of getting a White Wagtail (*Motacilla alba alba*) - more a "once in a lifetime" dream than a realistic hope! As September commenced, the numbers of birds increased markedly and at least 600 individuals were present when we made a large catch of 32 birds on 27th. While ringing these birds, Charlie Howe commented upon how small the next bird to come out of the bag was. We both looked at it (her) closely, surprised to see a pale grey head and back after the previous nine birds being black and dark grey. Somewhat puzzled by this, we referred to the ringers guide(Svensson) to help identify this bird as it was clearly not a Pied Wagtail. After reading through the Wagtail section repeatedly, the penny finally dropped - this was a first winter female White Wagtail! In the course of that evening another four of these birds were ringed. The project had begun.

The numbers of birds started to decline, but the proportion of White Wagtails present actually increased and by the time I stood up at the Glasgow SOC meeting in October, keen to share this important information, there were at least 200 White Wagtails present. This was when the real problems started! The record was largely disputed, mainly on the grounds that by current understanding, White Wagtail autumn passage doesn't exist! - the wagtails fly from Iceland direct to North Africa and only an occasional stray male appears in Scotland, except in Fair Isle, Shetland, where up to 120 can be seen. Worse was to come; during talks at the Scottish Ringers Conference, Argyll Bird Club Conference and various other meetings, I was to experience people walking out, heckling and heated discussions!

Although I did get some quiet support and encouragement, it was this negative stance that has continued to drive my enthusiasm. It would appear that most birders can identify White Wagtails in the spring due to their familiar breeding plumage, but very few people are aware of the birds' autumn plumage. The main reason for this problem

Autumn adult White Wagtail (Iain Livingstone)

is poor field guides, most do actually have pictures of autumn birds, but the plates are not accurate or are incorrectly labelled. As a result, a culture of being over-cautious has evolved so that most British birders will not risk making an error and insist on recording all autumn alba wagtails as Pied Wagtails. A staggering example of this came last year when a White Wagtail that we colour-ringed at The Olympia in East Kilbride, was seen at Brest, France. I had reported it to the B.T.O. as a White Wagtail, it was then reported back to me from them as a Pied Wagtail, only for me to have to fill in the sighting report as a White Wagtail! It would appear that this species changes its race from White to Pied as it passes from Iceland through the UK only to turn back into a White on reaching France.

The project has taken me to Spain where I have spoken with many other European ringers/birders, and when I tell them about this they all look at me in disbelief and say the same thing - "but your wagtails look nothing like White Wagtails". Clearly this is a British problem.

This project is now in its eighth year, a clear annual picture having emerged whereby the first White Wagtails arrive in the local roost by mid-August, their numbers increase until typically in mid-September, nearly 70% of all the birds present are White Wagtails. A few birds stay for up to a month, but most pass through very quickly. We have shown that some individuals return the next year and that many arrive in their juvenile plumage, suggesting perhaps that more may be breeding in Scotland than are actually recorded.

The project has developed further afield with many ringers, particularly in SE England, but also now in Grampian and Iceland, France and Spain involved in the project; things are getting very interesting. We are starting to get recoveries of White Wagtails moving within the UK and from the near continent, so our understanding of this species' migration has finally begun. We have also produced a photographic Identification Guide, which is available from the SOC website, and myself, to help as many people as possible to identify them. If anyone would like to come out and see these birds or know of a roost in your area that we could visit, please get in touch.

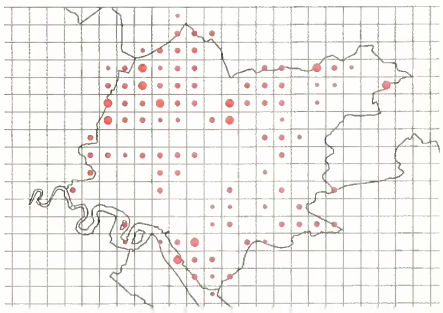
I would like to thank the SOC for this three-year research grant and all those other ringers that have become involved and developed this project.

Iain Livingstone,
iainlivcrg@blueyonder.co.uk

Clackmannanshire Breeding Bird Atlas

In February 2002, a small group, soon coming formally under the auspices of the Central Scotland Branch SOC, commenced planning a project intended to lead to publication of a 'Clackmannanshire Atlas'. The small size of the County prompted the choice of the 1 Kilometre National Grid square as the survey unit, making this distinct from most similar bird-mapping projects. There are 198 such squares wholly or partly within the County area. It was also decided to utilise available large scale standardised habitat survey mapping and to make particular efforts to gain detailed information on those species of conservation concern identified through the national and local Biodiversity Action Plans. A five-year programme to achieve coverage during the breeding season was the original target. However there was always an aspiration to go for a 'year round' Atlas and after four years it was clear that there were sufficient volunteer surveyors and sufficient enthusiasm to support winter coverage. Consequently the 2005/6 and 2006/7 winter periods are being used to create species distribution maps on a coarser tetrad grid (43 squares).

The current breeding season is the last for Countywide coverage and the group are on target to achieve this. There remain some species, as with all Atlas projects, for



Skylark survey

which some follow-up special surveys and record-checking will be necessary. Interim results point to nocturnal and crepuscular species as a particular area for further work during 2007. Clackmannanshire also has a few awkward spots purely in terms of access for surveyors - notably the Alloa Inches in the Forth estuary. After that, all we have to do is collate, analyse and write up the results, draft and edit all the other material necessary to create the finished work, and find the resources to support publication.

Funding so far has come mainly from SWT/Landfill Tax, SOC, and an annual 'payment by results' from Clackmannanshire Council relative to LBAP species information. The Steering Group has had a fluctuating membership with Neil Bielby a binding presence as Chair and currently Treasurer. SOC Central Scotland Branch are our 'bankers' and the Branch chair is a group member. The grants and other income received are largely devoted to the somewhat unglamorous but vital expenditures involved in keeping the group operating and the volunteer surveyors serviced with survey instructions, summer and winter recording forms, habitat maps, newsletters, etc. Even in this age of e-mail there is an awful lot of paperwork to be produced, reproduced, and posted around. Computer software for distribution mapping has been acquired and interim maps and analysis to assist with the final stages of survey work are being produced.

Our current publication target is 2009, and the administration of the drafting, editing, art-editing and publication stages will, we expect, be even more resource - intensive. At the outset the whole project looked daunting, yet we have come a long way since then.

David Thorogood

Eider in the Firth of Clyde

During 2001/2, 2002/3 and 2003/4, I received a SOC Research Grant in support of my project on the Eider populations of the Firth of Clyde.

The grant contributed to the costs of organising (printing and mailing of recording forms and a newsletter summarising the results) an annual post-moult survey of the Firth of Clyde. This survey covered most of the 800 km coastline and up to 35 volunteers took part in each year. It has firmly established that the September 5 year average population of c15,000 birds at this site (there is a strong case for the Firth of Clyde to be considered as a single (though complex) site), is now the largest population of Eider in the British Isles, and is internationally important.

The grant also supported a longer-term ringing programme, through the Clyde Ringing Group. It provided a valuable contribution to the hire of boats, and to the purchase of nets and rings. Two of the sites, Horse Island (an RSPB reserve off Ardrossan) and Faslane/Gare Loch have subsequently been registered by the Clyde Ringing Group as BTO RAS (Retrapping Adults for Survival) projects. As Eider are long-lived birds, these ringing and retrapping projects need to run for many years before yielding accurate estimates of adult survival. To date, almost 900 breeding females have been ringed in the 6 years of this study. In a parallel study, Bob Furness has a similar long-term ringing programme running on the Isle of Bute.

In addition to the ringing, some nesting females were nape-tagged at 5 separate sites to help to identify the duckling-rearing areas for each breeding colony. Most birds used the adjacent local mainland coastlines, within 10 km of colony, but some broods travelled over 30 km.

More recent studies are now colour-ringing females with colony specific colours. This will help to identify the breeding sites of individuals seen out of water, especially outside of the breeding season. This work continues....

Five Newsletters summarising the findings of this work can be found as pdf files on the SOC website, on the Clyde Branch page, at http://www.thesoc.zenwebhosting.com/docs/clydeeidernewsno1august2001.pdf and subsequent links on the same page.

Chris with a ringed female Eider (Paul Baker)

In addition to the SOC Research Grant, this work has also been generously supported by the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, and the BTO. I also owe a special gratitude to the many individuals who have helped to count, catch and ring Eider in the Firth of Clyde over the past years, and hope that many will continue to support the monitoring of this internationally important population. A special thanks goes to Iain Livingstone for the untiring support and encouragement of the Clyde Ringing Group. New volunteers are always welcome – please contact me at: chris.waltho@eider.org.uk or at 73 Stewart Street, Carluke, Lanarkshire, ML8 5BY.

Chris Waltho

A nape tagged female Eider (Chris Waltho)

July 26 - Swift thoughts for a fine day

Swifts (David Palmar)

A warm overcast morning – I have breakfast at about 8.15, am leaning out of my kitchen window - (2 up in a sandstone tenement in the east end of Glasgow) watching 2 –3 – 6 Swifts up and down the back court. Because the light is good and because I am nearly on the same level as they are, I can see that they are dark brown, not black.

I am taking advantage of a dental appointment to linger at home and go to take some pictures of a very good nest site provision designed by architects CRGP for a tenement renovation in Findlay Drive, Glasgow. Inside the roof area there are nest boxes constructed which lie on top of the wall plate – I just hope that the entrance holes cut through the outside faschia do after all give access to the boxes!

Swift nest box holes in to the eves (C. Darlaston)

Round the corner there is huge new development called Dennistoun Village. In spite of numerous phone calls and e-mails and letters, the developer eventually replied – " I will not have Swift nest sites in this building" – which was a great shame as these buildings are right in the heart of a Swift priority area and have wonderful opportunities for inbuilt nest sites. This is why it is essential that Swift nest site provision be made a condition of planning consent in appropriate developments. Edinburgh, Tayside and North Lanarkshire (and various English and Welsh councils) have achieved nest site provision in developments as a result of planning conditions. One of the most notable is the new schools programme in North Lanarkshire, where all new schools have this condition. As Glasgow City Council still finds itself unable to make Swift nest site retention or provision a condition of planning consent, we keep losing Swift nest sites and consequently Swift colonies, and fail to make alternative provision. It is rewarding however when developers and Housing Associations do agree through discussion and out of good will (as in Findlay Drive), but this is usually too unpredictable and time-consuming to effectively counteract the losses.

Returning from the dentist at about 10 am, within an area of about 3/4 mile east-west by 1/3 mile north-south, the world seems to be full of Swifts, flying, screaming, swooping, lilting, eaves hunting, soaring... There are probably no more than twenty , but twenty Swifts can do a good impression of "hundreds". Across the Parade, to the north of this area there is nothing. Silence.

Once about five years ago, there was a Swift colony there too in which I counted five active nest sites. Milnbank Housing Association was renewing roofs and faschias. It was agreed (after I had noticed the project) that the scaffolding would not be moved until the birds had fledged. But one Glasgow Fair Friday the scaffolding was moved, and I spent a horrid Saturday standing at a tenement close window opposite watching two pairs of Swifts try repeatedly to get to their nests – but being defeated by the edging boards. By Monday it was too late and they had gone - I later took a dead fledgling off a nest. On hindsight, I should have gone straight to the police. A recourse which is now made easier by the introduction of the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004. There are no Swifts in that area now, so "my" colony is even more localised.

People sometimes think that because there is a good number of Swifts over their house or street, there are plenty everywhere. That is not so and in larger conurbations a map of colonies will show how specific the locations are. I call those areas where there is a healthy colony (which for me is where I can see 6 or more Swifts around the buildings) a "Swift priority area"

Every effort should be made to save and replace Swift nest sites in and around these areas. In order to do this, we need to know where these priority areas are.

July is a good time to survey. On fine days the birds are around most of the morning, in the middle of the day and in the evening. They are active and vocal. Swifts have many social activities; like chasing. One bird will start to fly a bit faster than the others in the group, calling more rapidly than normal and on a single note - "*eeeeeeee*" . Often other Swifts will then give chase and a "rare tear" around the houses will begin, with the initiator in front and the rest "screaming" madly behind, others joining in until suddenly - they all fly up and disperse. Sometimes no-one wants to play and the would-be instigator will give up and rejoin the group.

Of the local authorities that have Swift SAPs (Species Action Plans), the biodiversity officers in Tayside, Edinburgh, Stirling, Inverness, Cairngorm and North Lanarkshire Council are collecting survey information. Concern for Swifts is collecting survey information for Glasgow (and anywhere else) For areas with no SAP, local SOC and RSPB member Pam Pumphrey is collecting for Dumfries and Galloway, SWT member Pat Stewart is collecting for Kirkintilloch and Jimmy Maxwell will take information relating to Hamilton and Motherwell area.

Survey for Swift nest site conservation is a bit different from your usual surveys. Maximum numbers and first and last arrivals are not really relevant. Nor are day-by-day surveys – excess of information clutters the data.

We need to know where Swifts are nesting – in which buildings if possible – but in which streets, areas of towns or villages It is always nice to know what style/age of building they are nesting in and where in it. For example most of the Glasgow colonies are now to be found in the inter-war housing stock, and on the advice of a building clerk-of-works one afternoon, I found a small colony in East Kilbride New Town later that evening. Records of where Swifts used to nest are also very important. We are only slowly getting a handle on location and sizes of colonies.

Survey information should include; date, number of Swifts, flying/screaming where?, flying/feeding where?, nest sites if seen, type of buildings, your name and address.

Bryant Homes, as well as completing a Swift nest box project at Slateford in Edinburgh (as a planning condition) has funded the new *Concern for Swifts (Scotland)* leaflets. These are available free if you send a s.a.e.(£1. for 50, 50p for 20, 37p for 10 or 2nd class stamp for 5 or less.) contact information for Cf S(S);

C. Darlaston, *2/1 287 Onslow Drive, Dennistoun, Glasgow G31 2QG 0141-554-8262 swiftscot@yahoo.co.uk*

MFMM – part 2

Continued from page 7

Submitted by **Keith Macgregor;**

The Naturalist's early morning walk
by M.F.M. Meiklejohn

When Phoebus rears his shining head
and drowsy woodlice leave their bed;
when milkmaids doff their flannel nighties;
when *Troglodytes troglodytes*
troglodytes (L.) is heard,
that tuneful and trinomial bird;
when *Pica pica pica* (Linn.)
scatters the rear of darkness thin;
when homeward reels the moping owl;
the ornithologist 'gins prowl.
He rises early, for he must
count Corncrakes for the British Trust;
or hear if *Cuculus canorus*
sings first in the auroral chorus;
or test the Red-backed Shrike's hygiene
with droppings made of plasticine.

For even after studious nights
at grips with ectoparasites,
with less than half an hour's rest,
he prances from his downy nest
at five – and not a moment later –
lest he should miss essential data
to show that Lesser Whitethroats lay
one egg at seven every day –
or even sometimes 9.2 :
this seems a curious thing to do,
did birds not know it were the norm,
when facts are shown in graphic form.
And lo! one day appears a screed,
that takes a Chinaman to read,
comprising 20,000 words
in January's *British Birds*.

The ornithologist at work
presents a sight to fright a Turk,
with gumboots, telescope and glasses,
protective hat festooned with grasses,
little boxes filled with ants,
patent impermeable pants,
notebooks, aluminium rings,
traps, cameras, elastic slings –
with many other things as well
contrived to make birds' lives a hell,
as tuning forks and metronomes –
AND the Handbook, all five tomes.

The Modern Bird is always fleeing
before this Frankensteinish being.
No wonder under such conditions
he is a mass of inhibitions!
When trained observers of this sort
are there with notebooks to report
his every impulse, every action,
no wonder he displays distraction!
In an advanced neurotic state
the Dunnock twitters to his mate :
"That egg you laid to-day was blotched :
I think it comes of being watched."
The Heron murmurs pessimistically :
"Can I, oh can I, be statistically
significant, or can I not?"
And th'unbridled Guillemot,
bewildered by so many "ifs",
is seen to hurl himself from cliffs.

All birds would rather quit their perch
than be a subject for research.
When Fisher's out with fire and sword,
the wary Fulmar goes abroad :
When Fitter goes pursuing rails,
the Spotted Crake retires to Wales :
the Crested Tit, by moor and loch,
is silent at th'approach of Koch :
the Grey-lag Goose would rather not
be painted blue by Peter Scott.

Obsessed by problems such as these,
our friend perambulates the leas.
Alas for him! The Modern Bird
is seldom seen and seldom heard.
So, having little to observe,
his thoughts to tenderer subjects swerve,
viz : the Companion of his Life;
I mean (need I insist?) his Wife:
and, pensive by the river's brim,
he dreams how he, a ♂ imm.,
and she, a blooming ♀ juv.,
proclaimed their youthful vows of love.
His matrimonial display
was typical in every way
and so was not reported on;
how different had he been a swan !

At last, obsessed by thoughts of tea
(that hub of man's ecology),
and ham and eggs, and towels and soap,
he seeks his rural biotope.

Ramsay Napier;
I greatly enjoyed the article on Maury Meiklejohn in *SBN* 80. When, as a schoolboy, I joined the Glasgow branch of the SOC in the early fifties, he was a leading light in their activities, especially the monthly meetings during the winter held, if I remember correctly, somewhere in Bath St.

One aspect of his travels which your correspondents did not touch on were his regular visits to Sardinia, which he wrote about in the *Herald* and which were truly fascinating. So much so that years later I took the family on their first Mediterranean holiday there rather than to Mallorca or Cyprus! Thank you for the memories.

BBC Breathing Places

BBC *Breathing Places* is an ambitious three-year campaign organised by the BBC to make a difference for wildlife. By involving one million people in thousands of local projects, it will improve sites all over the UK for biodiversity. The campaign will be supported by links with BBC programming, from Springwatch on BBC2 to Woman's Hour on Radio 4.

Organisations, communities and schools will be able to develop their own *Breathing Places*, and get support, including financial help, to transform places for wildlife. A community programme, managed by the Wildlife Trusts and the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers, will begin this summer, and a schools programme, managed by the RSPB, will be launched early in 2007.

See the BBC *Breathing Places* website for further details of this campaign as it gets going. http://www.bbc.co.uk/breathingplaces/

Alastair Lavery (alastair.lavery@rspb.org.uk)

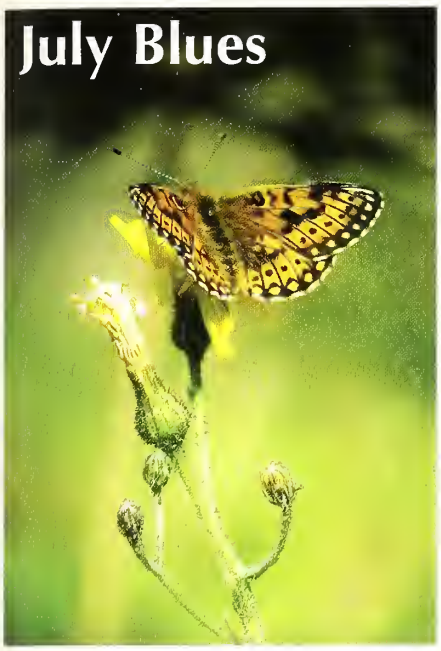
SOC stand with some visitors (Jimmy Maxwell)

As part of the collaborative initiative "Breathing Places" between RSPB and the BBC, the SOC was invited to host a stand at Chatelherault Country Park on 4th June. All the usual wildlife organisations were represented within several large marquees, with many different kinds of practical activities, talks and demonstrations going on in the open areas, all to do with encouraging the public to enjoy and respect our natural environment.

Our SOC stand, next to RSPB, had a steady stream of visitors, and enquiries kept the stall personnel busy. Chris Waltho led several walks into the surrounding countryside to find exactly what birds and other creatures were up to at this time. Identified species were noted and walkers drew from a list of possibilities related to breeding etc., depending on what activity was observed. This was a good publicity event with massive crowds enjoying the fine weather, the entertainments, the varied food on offer and generally learning a bit more about the natural world.

Jimmy Maxwell

July Blues



Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary (Jimmy Maxwell)

Do you remember the "dog days" of summer this year? In my dictionary, it defines them as "a period of inactivity". Certainly for birdwatchers, the endless hot days of July could have proved a bit unproductive, especially for photography. Birds by this time are pretty worn out, having already raised their families, are still being pestered for food by fully-fledged young and many looking rather distressed as moulting approaches. At the time, I was down South on a fairly extensive caravan tour and my camera/telescope gear, normally in constant use for photographing birds, only produced three bird images in all. The holiday however was full of wildlife interest and photography – the targets were butterflies and dragonflies.

More and more birdwatchers are becoming fascinated by these intriguing creatures. Like birds, it is the structural beauty and variety which, together with all their behavioural characteristics, drives my enthusiasm. I suppose also that as we become more conscious of global warming and its effect on our insects, it makes sense that this awareness is matched by an aesthetic appreciation of the 'beasties' themselves.

Working from only a very little knowledge acquired so far in this pursuit, several points have already become apparent to me;

Butterflies and dragonflies have varying periods when they appear and fly – thus Ringlet butterflies (see photo) can be expected in July, but Large Red Damselflies anytime after the end of May. Most books link each species to its flying period and also list all the species flying at certain times. Some books also offer a site-guide which has coverage maps and gives specific hotspots for each species.

2. Sunshine is a necessity for the insects to appear. This was illustrated for me as I watched a Green Hairstreak butterfly perching on Blaeberry foliage. To cut down the sun's glare and obtain a better photograph, I had someone cast a shadow on the insect. In a few seconds, it began to pirouette round, hoping to catch the light; when this failed, the butterfly climbed down a stalk right out of sight. Organise your visits to coincide with the sun!

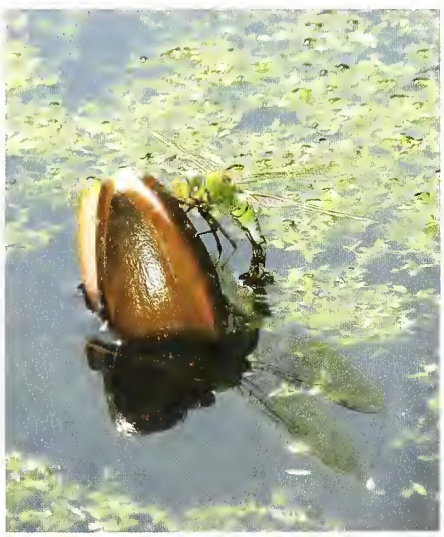
3. All butterflies have favourite 'host' plants on which they and their offspring feed, eg. the Common Blue searches out Bird's Foot Trefoil. Dragonflies, like butterflies, can also be expected in certain habitats, eg. the Black Darter will be found in peaty areas. Most books inform on these.

4. Lastly, of course, comes identification. Like birds, you must know which features to look out for, and like birds, some are pretty tricky. Binoculars with a good close focus will be a real asset here and a book with really clear illustrations and handy recognition tips is essential.

Ringlet (Lang Stewart)

Some butterflies appear during our birds' breeding season and I well remember when monitoring my Willow Tits here in Lanarkshire, coming across a hatch of Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries (see title photo) – they're only seen for a short while at the beginning of June. Of course, once you know this, you can look out for them appearing.

Although Scotland has many special insects, some indigenous, a trip down into England will enrich the species list. Two examples are worth quoting from July this year when birds and insects made the perfect day for me. The first was in Suffolk, at Minsmere RSPB Reserve, where from the Bittern Hide, we watched four Marsh Harriers and three Hobbies, all in our glasses at the same time. An hour later, high in one of the many oak trees there, I discovered my very first tiny Purple Hairstreak butterfly and digiscoped it from the ground. The second was while watching Nuthatches at Felbrigg Hall in Norfolk – beautiful woodland, ornamental gardens and a tiny lily pond. A female Emperor dragonfly came down to lay her eggs under the surface, perching delicately on an emerging lily bud (see photo). Only the camera itself was required this time.



Emperor Dragonfly ovipositing (Jimmy Maxwell)

Many enthusiasts develop their interest over time to specialise in for example, all the Fritillaries or perhaps the "Blues" from around the world. But everyone has to start somewhere, so why not get going? Begin with the common species that are still around even now in September and prepare for next year. Perhaps a Dragonfly book for Xmas? Remember, as with birds, the scene changes as you travel abroad, with lots of new species to find. So in the future, perhaps Spain or France? So '*bon chance*' in '*les jours de chien*'!

Jimmy Maxwell

Seabird numbers and breeding success in 2005

Gannet - breeding numbers are increasing in Scotland *(Nicky Penford)*

The seventeenth annual report of the results of seabird monitoring at colonies throughout Britain and Ireland has been produced jointly by JNCC, RSPB and SOTEAG, as part of JNCC's Seabird Monitoring Programme. It summarises available data on seabird breeding numbers and breeding success at seabird colonies in 2005 and compares with results from previous years, primarily 2004, with an analysis of longer-term trends in the context of recent findings. The report was authored by Roddy Mavor, Matt Parsons (both JNCC), Martin Heubeck (SOTEAG) and Sabine Schmitt (RSPB), but the information was collated from many sources. These include research staff and wardens from a variety of organisations including RSPB, SOTEAG, JNCC, Scottish Natural Heritage, English Nature, Countryside Council for Wales, Irish National Parks and Wildlife Service, the Wildlife Trusts, bird observatories, National Trust and National Trust for Scotland, the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology and BirdWatch Ireland, plus many dedicated fieldwork volunteers. The authors would appreciate comments, offers of help or any existing additional information on numbers or breeding success for any seabird species, whether at coastal or inland colonies, which may not have been previously submitted to the Seabird Monitoring Programme.

The Seabird Monitoring Programme and Seabird Colony Register

The JNCC's Seabird Monitoring Programme facilitates the co-ordination of seabird monitoring on a UK-wide basis. The aim of the programme is to ensure that sufficient data on breeding numbers and breeding success of seabirds are collected both regionally and nationally to enable their conservation status to be assessed. The programme assists JNCC, RSPB and partner organisations, including the statutory country nature conservation agencies, to monitor aspects of the health of the wider marine environment and to provide sound advice relevant to the conservation needs of breeding seabirds.

Seabird monitoring directly funded by JNCC focuses particularly on species such as Fulmar, Shag, Kittiwake and auks, for which changes in breeding populations, breeding success or other parameters may provide evidence of changes in the marine environment as a whole. The most detailed monitoring is undertaken, through external JNCC contracts, at several geographically dispersed 'key sites': Isle of May (south-east Scotland), Fair Isle (Shetland), Canna (north-west Scotland) and Skomer (Wales).

Triennial monitoring of numbers and breeding success is also undertaken by JNCC on Orkney Mainland, on St. Kilda (north-west Scotland) and in Grampian (north-east Scotland); monitoring on St. Kilda in 2005 was undertaken by National Trust for Scotland, with assistance from JNCC. Monitoring of breeding success of cliff-breeding species is also encouraged by JNCC at many other colonies, partly by contributing to fieldwork costs of volunteers via the Seabird Group.

The RSPB monitors the numbers and breeding success of a range of seabird species throughout the UK through their network of reserves, and largely co-ordinates the monitoring of terns in Britain. Further RSPB monitoring or survey effort is directed at petrels and skuas.

In Shetland, Aberdeen University, under contract to SOTEAG, carries out extensive population monitoring of cliff-nesting species and Black Guillemots. This work is funded by the Sullom Voe Association Ltd. and forms part of a wider scheme of biological monitoring in Shetland. For Fulmar, Guillemot and Razorbill, annual counts are carried out in sample plots, and for Shag, Kittiwake and Black Guillemot, counts are made of longer stretches of coastline at intervals of two or more years. Breeding success has also been assessed annually at many colonies since the mid-1980s.

The JNCC and Seabird Group also collaborate on the Seabird Colony Register, a database of colony counts for Britain and Ireland for the period 1969 to 1998, which is maintained as part of the Seabird Monitoring Programme. Many observers and organisations (including SOTEAG and RSPB) have contributed to the SCR and data have also been abstracted from sources such as research reports and county bird reports. Nearly all coastal colonies in Britain and Ireland were censused for the SCR in 1985–87, providing a baseline for seabird populations. A repeat complete census of British and Irish seabird colonies, Seabird 2000 (running from 1998–2002), was published as *Seabird Populations of Britain and Ireland* and the results are available at: www.jncc.gov.uk/marine/seabirds/seabird2000/default.htm with data on individual sites accessible at www.searchnbn.org.uk. A new seabird colony database for the period from 1999 is being developed within the National Biodiversity Network framework (a system for sharing information on wildlife being made available on the internet).

General features of the 2005 breeding season

The first significant weather effect on seabirds in 2005 were gales and low temperatures in late winter in the North Sea, which, combined with a possible scarcity of food, resulted in an extended period of poor feeding conditions, most notably for Shags. The National Beached Bird Survey found increased numbers of dead Shags (and, to a lesser degree, Cormorants and auks), mainly along coasts of eastern Britain, which were due to this 'wreck'. In addition, it is thought that many of the survivors were in poor condition and therefore did not breed. Consequently, the number of Shags that nested in 2005 was generally much lower than in 2004, especially in the north and east coast of Britain, where decreases of between 6 and 54% occurred.

April was changeable and wet in the UK as a whole, but often fine in Scotland in the latter half of the month. A brief cold spell occurred on 7–8 April, when Shetland recorded its coldest maximum April temperature for 20 years (0.1°C). A depression brought rain and gales to many parts near the end of the month. May was, on average, the coolest since 1996 and wetter than average in the north. There was a brief cold period mid month, with late frosts. The first half of June was cool, but thereafter was largely warm or hot and on average it was the warmest June since 1976. It was a wet month for much of Scotland. July started with a period of cool and unsettled weather, with coastal gales and heavy rain. There followed a spell of hot weather, but the last ten days were very unsettled and cool.

The 2005 breeding season started generally later than average for many species in the Northern Isles and in places on the east coast of Britain. It appeared that food availability in these regions was low at the start of the season, resulting in delayed breeding, but increased later, in May and June, which apparently facilitated nest building and laying. Red-throated Diver chicks from Hermaness, Shetland were thought to be about 10–20 days later than those from other sites on Unst, possibly due to later laying, poor food availability, or both. Arctic Tern, Kittiwake, Guillemot, Razorbill and Puffin all delayed breeding in many Shetland colonies and also on the Isle of May. Timing of breeding on the Isle of May was, overall, the latest ever recorded: the first Kittiwake egg was not seen until 30 May; the first Shag egg was laid on 6 May (*cf.* 17 April in 2004 and 1986–2003 mean of 10 April); the first Guillemot egg was laid on 4 May (the latest date yet recorded at the site) and the median laying date was 17 May. Razorbills and Puffins were also late on the Isle of May, the latter species breeding five days later than in any year since monitoring began on the island. Exceptions to this late tendency were seen in Shag at some - but not all - colonies in NW Scotland, which laid earlier than average (though Shags in Shetland and south-east Scotland laid very late).

In general the 2005 seabird breeding season was slightly more successful than that of 2004, when widespread breeding failures occurred in the Northern Isles and in places down the east coast of Britain. The failures in 2004 were thought to have been caused largely by low availability of sandeels; this was again the case in 2005, with sandeels being less prevalent than usual in the diets of many species or, if still prevalent, of the less-preferred size-class. Indeed, sandeels were so scarce in the North Sea that the European Commission closed the sandeel fishery in July 2005. However, in some colonies in 2005 alternative fish prey, such as gadoids, appeared to provide sufficient nutrition to enable at least some chicks to fledge. In contrast to 2004 and indeed most previous years, colonies in the north-west of Scotland appeared to suffer from low food availability in 2005, with Arctic Terns, Kittiwakes and Puffins experiencing very low breeding success. For example, Kittiwakes on Canna for the first time on record suffered breeding failure, and the species had the least successful season on record on Handa. On St. Kilda, Puffins were very unsuccessful, due to apparent low availability of suitable prey (e.g. sandeels or sprats) – instead adults brought back large numbers of inedible pipefish to their chicks, many of which starved or were unlikely to fledge.

A summary of 2005 in Scotland

Red-throated Diver breeding success was close to, or above, average at the majority of sites monitored, although all nests on Coll failed due to bad weather.

Fulmar numbers were stable in most regions between 2004 and 2005, although there was a large increase in NE Scotland. UK productivity was similar to 2004 and thus below the long-term mean. By contrast, the UK and Ireland **Gannet** population has increased by 13% to 262,066 AOS since 1994–95.

In response to a late winter/early spring wreck **Cormorant** and **Shag** numbers decreased in many eastern regions and, for shag, also in NW Scotland. Productivity of Shags in Shetland and N and SE Scotland was particularly low, possibly due to birds failing to attain adequate breeding condition.

After 12 years of decline, the number of **Arctic Skua** territories increased, although numbers remain low. There was a marked increase in Shetland, where the number of **Great Skua** territories also increased, but both species decreased in Orkney. Skuas were more productive than in 2004, despite a scarcity of sandeels.

The Sands of Forvie by the Ythan Estuary, Aberdeenshire - an important nesting area for terns, with the largest Sandwich Tern colony in Scotland *(Ian Francis)*

Black-headed and **Common Gulls** increased in most regions. Some large mixed colonies of **Lesser Black-backed** and **Herring Gull** have declined substantially in recent years. At most gull colonies breeding success was low to moderate in 2005. Once again, mink depressed the productivity of four gull species in NW and SW Scotland.

Breeding success of **Kittiwake** was higher than in 2004, but still well below average for the UK and Ireland. Apparently low food availability early in the season resulted in late nest building at several colonies but conditions improved, allowing many birds to breed successfully. However, low success in NW Scotland and complete failure in N Scotland was attributed to low food availability there.

Sandwich Tern numbers in Scotland declined between 2004 and 2005, with lower breeding success. **Roseate Tern** numbers were stable between 2004 and 2005 at the one Scottish colony monitored, with slightly lower productivity.

Common Tern numbers decreased slightly in Scotland, with a substantial decrease in NE Scotland. Colonies adjacent to the Irish Sea were the most productive. Food availability problems probably depressed productivity in west and north Scotland. The number of **Arctic Terns** in Shetland and Orkney recovered from the declines in 2004, with increases noted in most other regions. Breeding success was higher than in 2004, although only marginally so in the Northern Isles, probably due to low food availability. **Little Tern** productivity in Scotland was higher than in the previous five years, and numbers were similar to 2004.

Guillemot and **Razorbill** numbers in sample plots increased (or at least remained stable) in northern and eastern regions, with decreases in NW and SW Scotland. Whole-colony counts were broadly in line with these changes. For both species, breeding success was higher than in 2004 but still markedly below the long-term mean. Colonies in the north of Britain were generally less successful than others.

Black Guillemot numbers in Shetland and Orkney were stable between 2004 and 2005. However, numbers have halved in Orkney since 1986, although there has been no net change in Shetland over this period.

Extracted (with permission) from the full report: Mavor, R.A., Parsons, M., Heubeck, M. and Schmitt, S. 2006. *Seabird numbers and breeding success in Britain and Ireland, 2005*. Peterborough, Joint Nature Conservation Committee. (UK Nature Conservation, No. 30.).

Contact: roddy.mavor@jncc.gov.uk

NOTES & COMMENT

Mystery duckling

A very young, healthy Eider Duck chick was handed in to rangers at Strathclyde Country Park, N. Lanarkshire, at the beginning of June. It had been found near Cambuslang, Glasgow, which is around 15 miles from the nearest breeding Eiders. The circumstances are not entirely clear, but mention was made of some interaction with a Lesser Black-backed Gull.

Eider feeding time *(Jimmy Maxwell)*

More fortunate Eider ducklings in a crèche at Musselburgh *(Jimmy Maxwell)*

The chick (shown above) immediately started to feed on nutritious pellets and maggots placed in a water tray, hoovering them up with great gusto. It could also dive down for food when placed in a deeper tank. All progressed smoothly, with weight being gained daily, till 18th June when the bird suddenly died. The true story of its appearance will probably remain an intriguing mystery.

Duncan Watt, artist and designer, has been very much involved at Muirshiel with talks and artwork concerning the Hen Harriers; some of his work will shortly be coming on sale. (www.spectrus.co.uk)

Hen Harriers – the bad news and the good news

Watchers at the well-known Clyde Muirshiel Hen Harrier breeding site this year were once again to witness the nest attacked by that natural predator, the fox. In SBN 77 last year, we carried the story of the nestlings being taken by a fox which returned for each one until only the male "runt" was left. The video footage however then showed this youngster's successful fight-back to foil the fox's efforts.

This year, another pair produced four eggs, the first hatching on 21st July, with the public at the Centre witnessing several exciting food passes etc via another video link.

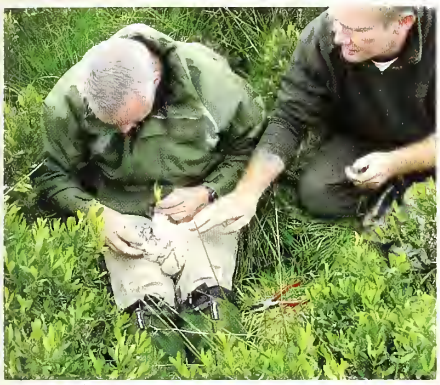
However within the process of the chicks arriving, the female was attacked on the nest, being pulled off backwards by the fox. She somehow survived this but was subjected to another onslaught later in which one of the young was killed. Although the last egg hatched, the female Harrier was obviously traumatised and understandably, deserted the remains of her family. SNH funding for the Hen Harrier project still has one year to go, so we wish them luck for next year.

Meanwhile at another watched Hen Harrier site in the Gareloch area, things turned out quite differently. SOC member John Simpson, Wildlife Liaison Officer for the Faslane Naval Base and a sergeant in

The young Hen Harriers *(Lang Stewart)*

the MOD Police, had discreetly observed a developing family of three young as part of his remit to conserve the wildlife of the area. As the appropriate time for chick-ringing approached, John, a trainee ringer, decided to record the event in an organised photo-shoot.

The site was carefully approached and the youngsters in the nest – two females and a smaller male, were photographed. The ringing procedure, conducted under the watchful eye of qualified ringer Dave Anderson, included weighing, measuring and recording all the data. Although this is always a painstaking and necessarily exact business, the process was soon completed and the anxious parents were able to return to their brood.



Getting down to it *(Lang Stewart)*

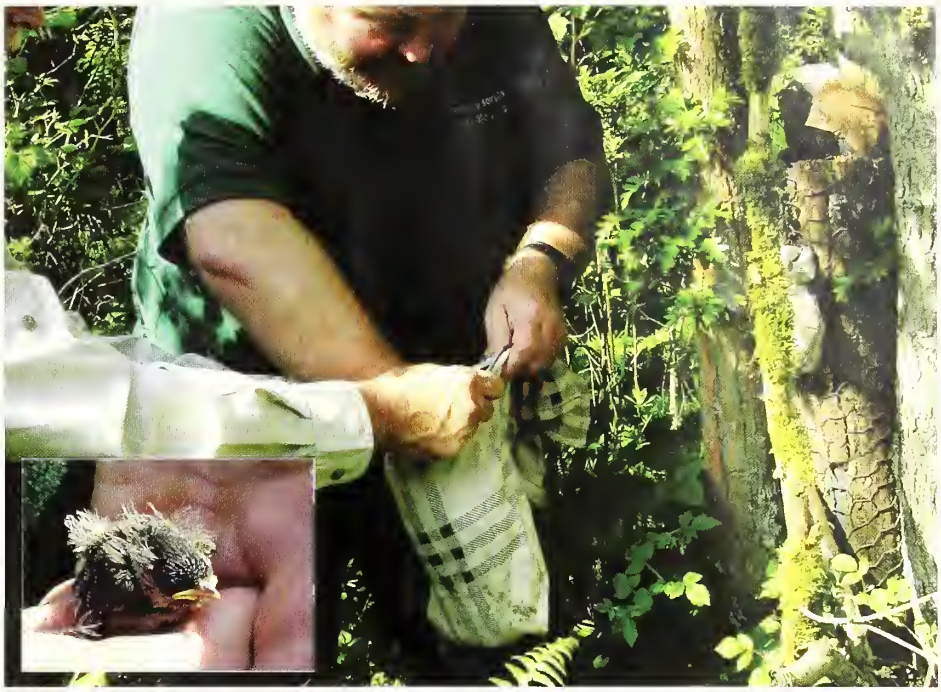
Considering the pressure on Hen Harriers from natural sources and the amount of poisoning and shooting that still takes place in Scotland, the success of this family is really good news.

Jimmy Maxwell

What do we call it?

How should we refer to our building at Aberlady? Waterston House, SOC Birdwatching Centre, SOC Centre, etc? Does it matter? I think it does. To members Waterston House rolls off the tongue and looks good in print but this is because we know why it is called this and that it has been referred to as such from the start. But what does it mean to most people who are not members? Waterston House is meaningless but say SOC Birdwatching Centre and these people immediately know it is about birds and the word "Centre" indicates it is important and maybe worth seeing. Living about five miles away if I mention "Waterston House" to my neighbours' faces are blank. Mention "Birdwatching Centre" and they usually say something like "Oh that's the building at Aberlady" In the future this identification will become more important as the SOCs image is built up and memories of George Waterston fade. Worth thinking about and discussing?

Frank Hamilton



Ringing at the nestbox. Inset: Willow Tit chick *(Lang Stewart)*

Last of the line?

On Tuesday 6th June (6/6/6) I accompanied Charlie Howe, a ringer and park ranger at Strathclyde Country Park, to ring the last recorded brood of Willow Tits in Lanarkshire. Charlie has ringed about 5000 birds both here and in Europe but somehow this seemed one of his more significant jobs.

The location of the nest has been noted, monitored and protected by Jimmy Maxwell who has had a 13 year interest in monitoring and encouraging the Willow Tit population in this area. After leading the group to the nest site, Jimmy removed the top camouflaged covering of the specialised nest box the birds had used. The brood count was an encouraging 9 and they were quickly removed and placed into a bag. Charlie laid out the rings, a white one (colour code for this brood) and a metal BTO one for each bird. After ringing, he placed each youngster in a second bag and continued until all the birds were ringed. I took photos during the operation and a couple of quick shots of the young birds in hand before they were placed back in the nest. The nest and site were quickly restored to normal as the parents had been making their sneezing calls all around us during the process.

The impending demise of these magical woodland birds is a great disappointment to the birding world, Willow Tits having suffered a 75% reduction in the last 10 years and been red-flagged as a species in crisis.

For me it was a real privilege to be involved with a group of people who use all their various skills to help maintain, monitor and protect birds that we all appreciate watching.

Lang Stewart

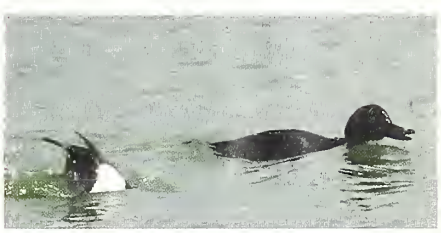
Caption Competition

Provide a caption for the Starling picture below and have a chance of winning an SOC hat.

Starlings *(Stewart Love)*

Each *SBN* edition will feature a new photo. The winner and other best captions will be shown in *SBN* 82. Send your single caption by E-mail to jimmy.maxwell @virgin.net (or of course by mail to the SOC – see Page 3).

The winning Caption from *SBN* 80 (see Tufted Duck photo below) came from Andy Neustein with – "Yeah, Yeah, Global warming. You'll be telling me there are crocodiles here next" Well done! Others – "How many more times are you going to lose your purse!!"- Michael Thomas. "Don't you dare dive when I'm speaking to you!" – Morag Maxwell.



Tufted Ducks *(Stewart Love)*

BOOK REVIEWS

The Nature of the Cairngorms - Diversity in a changing environment Edited by Philip Shaw and Des Thompson, SNH March 2006 The Stationery Office Ltd. (TSO) Edinburgh ISBN 0114-97326-1 £20

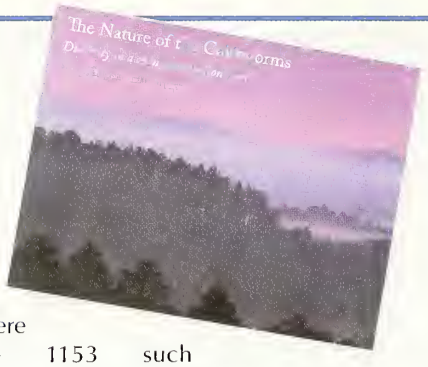
I was asked on behalf of the SOC to the launch of this marvellous book at Battleby and met many of the authors and SNH staff involved with the book. As I live just outside the National Park boundary and visit the area in all seasons, I was delighted to be asked to do this review.

This lovely book with its distinctive purple cover is not designed to be read from cover to cover but is one to dip into, to discover some more interesting facts about one of the most important areas in Scotland, and indeed the British Isles. The introduction leads us up through the habitats from the lower wetlands, through the forests onto the moors and finally to the high tops - just enough to whet our appetite to find out more from the ensuing chapters.

There are three main sections, with the first describing the whole area of the Cairngorms, its ancient history, geology, landscape, land use over the years, and the flora and fauna found there now. Each chapter is written by one or more authority in that field, well-written and illustrated with superb photographs. There are lots of graphs and tables which help give you the whole picture but which might put some readers off. I found that I skipped these in some chapters but really looked at them in the chapters which I found most interesting. As I continued through the book, I did keep looking up the maps to pinpoint the features mentioned and I think it is one of the delights of the book – you can delve deeply or just dip in.

The second section deals with the nature of change in the Cairngorms – climate change, deer management and recreation. This is not a static region of Scotland, trapped in a time capsule, but an ever-changing, vibrant, hugely important area for all of us to enjoy. Recreation in the Highlands, especially skiing, mountain biking and walking, have a big impact on the Cairngorms and there has to be a balance between conservation and land management.

The last chapter is an overview showing patterns of species diversity and richness in the Cairngorms, focusing on those species for which the area is considered to be nationally or internationally important.



There are 1153 such species, of which 32% are invertebrates, 28% lichens, 20% fungi, 9% bryophytes and 7% vascular plants. Only 2% are birds and fewer than 0.5% are fish and mammals. In some ways this is surprising, as most people tend to think of birds like Dotterel, Ptarmigan and Golden Eagle being really important and forgetting the huge numbers of invertebrates and plants. Similarly, the high tops form only one habitat in this huge National Park, but arguably it is the best known. Habitat associations are discussed, the richest areas identified and the importance of continued monitoring of all the species found in the Park stressed.

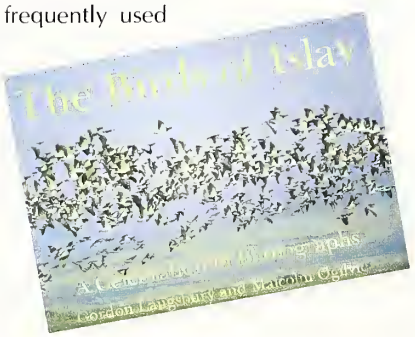
I have immensely enjoyed reading this book, knowing that having visited the area, I can then come back to find out more from the book before the next visit.

Janet Crummy

The Birds of Islay A Celebration in Photographs Gordon Langsbury (Photographer) & Malcolm Ogilivie (Author). Lochindaal Press , ISBN 0 9551146 0 8 (2006) £17.50 (Paperback)

This is a well presented, large format (A4) photographic guide to the birds of Islay. The authors are both well known in their field and have links to the island. They have been selective in their choice of subject, covering 171 species, 120 of which breed on Islay either regularly or occasionally, and including the commoner winter visitors and passage migrants. It is intended to fill the niche of illustrating the Birds of Islay which, according to the authors, has not been done before.

The introduction provides brief background information about Islay, its history, habitat and scenery and its most important birds. The book follows the frequently used



pattern of the four seasons, starting with spring. Each bird is illustrated with a large photograph, usually, though not always one per page. Each picture is supplemented by a brief summary of the bird's status in Islay. A photographic index is provided making the book equally easy to browse or to search for specific information.

Jean Torrance

RSPB Birds of Britain & Ireland Interactive and PDA Edition Christopher Helm, ISBN 0-713674407-01 (2005) £39.95

System Requirements: PC Edition – Pentium 2–300 or better, 128 MB RAM, Windows 98/ME/2000/XP, 600 MB hard drive space. PDA Edition: Windows PDA unit with Windows Mobile Pocket PC 2002 or later, 128 MB SD-card or larger.

The program is supplied on a single disc that installs both the PC and PDA edition to a PC. Shockwave, which is required, is bundled in the installation, and both programs need to be registerd, although this can be done later.

The installation was seemless, although I was unable to test the PDA version as I don't own a PDA. The program itself is relatively cheap, but there would be additional overheads for the PDA version, depending on what equipment you already own (see Lang Stewart's review of Collin eGuide in Scottish Bitd News 80 , June 2006, for general PDA hardware comments)

The program is very intuitive. You can choose to set up different users to allow individual customisation and documentation using the interactive tools. A toolbar and dropdown menus allow quick navigation and searches at all times. From there or the from the Home page you can access the Birds section - each species entry has text, maps & pictures , with very good recordings of around half of the 567 detailed species entries, which I particularly enjoyed;

- an Identification section with interactive filters to narrow down the choices;
- a Lists section where you can build up a 'database' of information, maps, photos etc.;

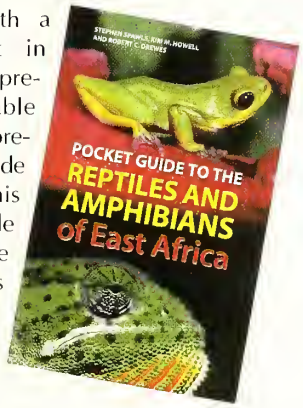
- a Birding Sites section with interactive maps and site descriptions , organised by Counties/Regions within England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales (for example there are 7 sites documented in Lothian and Borders);

- and last, but not least, the Introduction with comprehensive user information plus Help and Support sections.

Never having used an interactive multimedia bird guide before, I found this one quite addictive. Now if only I had a PDA !

Jean Torrance

Pocket guide to the reptiles and amphibians of East Africa Richard Spawls, Kim M Howell & Robert C Drewes. A&C Black, London, ISBN 10 0-7136-7425-3. ISBN 13 978-0-7136-7425-5 2006 £14.99 (Paperback)



For anyone with a general interest in wildlife, a comprehensible, portable and fairly comprehensive field guide is a must. This pocket guide fulfills these criteria. It is comprehensive, though not exhaustive, covering 200 reptiles and 80 amphibia, and is well illustrated. Each entry is roughly half a page per principal species including text, good sized photograph and map. There are summary notes for other species. It is a neat, compact guide which would not strain your luggage allowance.

Jean Torrance

Change in the British Flora 1987–2004 M E Braithwaite, R W Ellis, C D Preston Botanical Society of the British Isles London 2006 (£12 from Amazon) (Paperback)

This new report analyses 2km x 2km square Botanical survey data collected in 1987–88 and again in 2003–4. It covers a shorter time period and less coarse grid than earlier 10 km square surveys, being more sensitive to the measurement of local change. Plant distribution data was recorded for Native and archeotype species in broadly classified habitats. In addition to a general discussion of trends affecting each habitat and its distribution, the effects on individual species within a habitat are recorded with maps, text and illustrations.

Insofar as changes in habitat can have a significant effect on birds and other wildflife, I would expect this new and timely volume to provide a wealth of background information for anyone researching habitiat management, population studies etc.

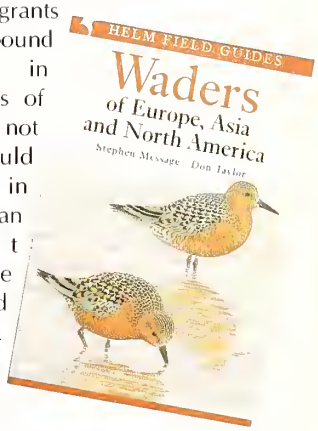
Jean Torrance

Waders of Europe, Asia and North America Stephen Message and Don Taylor, 2005. Christopher Helm, London. 224pp, ISBN 0-7136-5290-X, £24.99.

This soft-backed field-guide is aimed at the travelling wader enthusiast, since it covers all 124 species found in the Northern Hemisphere, and so includes exotics like Ibisbill and Spoon-billed Sandpiper as well as our more familiar species. After a comprehensive introduction it is divided into two principal sections: the first, consisting of 45 colour plates with clear text opposite the superb illustrations, describes the birds at rest using the sequence and nomenclature established by Clements in the 2000 *Birds of the World: A Checklist*. The second part comprises another 32 plates comparing the birds in flight: in this section the authors have used a little more licence in grouping the birds by similarly plumaged species: very clear distribution maps are included in this section.

The texts are very well written, and the detailed introductory section advises on many aspects of identification, whether at rest or in flight. The illustrations by Stephen Message are excellent.

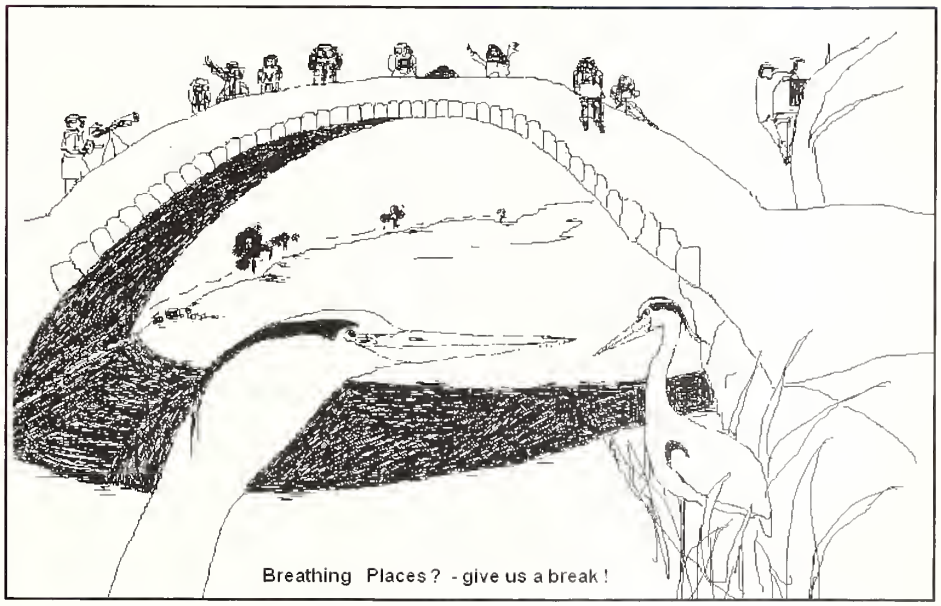
Would I buy it? As a field guide it is slim, but at a fraction over 6ins by 9ins it is a bit large for the pocket and, of course, it deals purely with waders. If I'm visiting a new area, then personally, I'm more likely to need a more general field guide, and with all the other bits and pieces in the rucksack, I probably don't want to carry two! And although many waders are such long-distance migrants that some are bound to finish up in unexpected parts of the world, I'm not sure that I would carry it 'just in case'. But it is an excellent reference publication, and those with a particular interest in shorebirds will certainly want to consider it.



Mike Betts

Adverts in *SBN*

In our next issue, details will be given about advertising within SBN. This could include adverts for holiday accom. here or abroad, small personal ads or commercial goods and services. Conditions and charges will be stated.



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RECENT REPORTS

A review of summer 2006

The most popular rarity of the period was the 1st-summer **Black Stork** that remained in the Eye Water valley in the Grantshouse/Houndwood area (Borders) for almost a month, from 25th June–23rd July. Only the 2nd record for Borders, it may have been the same bird that was responsible for a series of fly-over sightings during May and is the first twitchable bird in Scotland since July 1998, when a long-staying 1st-summer was present in Aberdeenshire and then Highland (and was then subsequently seen in Northumberland and Suffolk). Up to nine **Little Egrets** were reported during June and July, but no other rare herons/egrets were reported and there were no midsummer sightings of Spoonbill for the first time in many years.

A **Snowy Owl** remained throughout the summer on the Outer Hebrides, still there in early Aug at least on North Uist with another seen near Tarbet, Sutherland (Highland) on 19th June. The **Black-browed Albatross** remained on Sula Sgeir (Outer Hebrides) up to the 1st July at least, being successfully twitched on two occasions by boats chartered out of Oban and Kinlochbervie. The first boatload, from

Bearded Tit, North-East Scotland (Pete Shepherd)

Oban, on their journey through The Minch, had close up views of a **Bridled Tern** 7 miles northwest of Rubha Reidh (Highland) on 23rd June – sixth record for Scotland. June was a good month for rare terns with an adult **Whiskered Tern** present on the evening of the 5th at Loch of Skene (North-East Scotland) – only the third Scottish record, the last also being in North-East Scotland, in 2001. Also a **White-winged Black Tern** was seen briefly at Luskentyre, Harris (Outer Hebrides) on 16th. Four adult **Laughing Gulls** were reported between 6th June–11th July from the Outer Hebrides, Argyll and Shetland, all in June, and then again in the North Sea at the Buchan Alpha Oil Platform, 120 miles NE of Aberdeen on 11th July. Two 1st-summer **Ring-billed Gulls** were on Lewis in June, with an adult on Tiree (Argyll) on 19th July. A 1st-summer **Iceland Gull** remained throughout the period at Mallaig harbour (Highland) with in July, single **Glaucous Gulls** on Fair Isle and at Stevenston (Ayrshire). Returning **Mediterranean Gulls** were reported from the 18th July with juveniles being noted on the Outer Hebrides, Lothian and Ayrshire. **Little Gull** numbers too started to build up from mid-July in Angus and Fife, with 300 at Monifieth on 29th July and at Fife Ness 450 counted on the 2nd Aug with 400 also seen there on the 4th. In August an adult **Yellow-legged Gull** was at Musselburgh Lagoons on the 9th – there are currently no accepted records for Lothian.

In June at least two **Red-footed Falcons** were seen on Shetland with a female at Brow Marsh on the 10th and then presumably the same bird at Fladdabister on the 13th. A 1st-summer male was at Collafirth, Delting briefly on the 12th whilst in July, a 1st-summer male was reported from Evie (Orkney) on 25th. Ten **Hobbies** were reported in June and eight in July, four of which were in North-East Scotland. The 200th **White-tailed Eagle** chick to be bred in Scotland since birds were reintroduced, occurred on Skye this summer with this likely to be the best year yet for fledgling White-tailed Eagles. Another raptor now becoming well-established as a breeding species in Scotland is **Marsh Harrier** - it had a good season with seven nests in the Tay Reedbeds area (Perth & Kinross) producing 18 fledged chicks. Five singing **Reed Warblers** there this year also points to that species' continued establishment in Scotland, whilst after a poor year in 2005, **Bearded Tits** enjoyed a good season in the Tay Reedbeds with up to 100 pairs this year. The only extralimital report was of a male at the Ythan Estuary (North-East Scotland) up to the 21st July at least. The numbers of calling **Corncrakes** across Scotland was slightly up this year with c.1,100 calling males recorded including 310 on Tiree and 112 on Lewis. Singing **Spotted Crakes** were reported from Orkney, Outer Hebrides and Argyll, whilst it was another reasonable summer for singing **Quail** with c.20 reported in June and 22+ in July with most reports coming from Lothian. Numbers of breeding **Red-necked Phalaropes** were down this year on Shetland and the Outer Hebrides, whilst the only one reported away from these areas was at Forfar Loch (Angus) on the 14th June.

Black Stork, Borders (Brendan Doe)

Red-necked Phalarope, Outer Hebrides (Martin Scott)

White-tailed Eagle, Highland *(Iain Leach)*

Great Reed Warbler, Angus *(Al McNee)*

Angus also played host to a popular singing male **Great Reed Warbler** at RSPB Loch of Kinnordy from 11th June–13th July (presumed to be the same as the bird present nearby in May at Forfar Loch). For the third spring running, a **Paddyfield Warbler** was seen on Shetland, trapped and ringed at Skaw, Whalsay on the 12th June whilst also in June, a **River Warbler** was heard singing briefly but not seen on Fair Isle on 15th with also there a female **Subalpine Warbler** on 6th. Numbers of late spring scarcities though were very low in June with only two **Icterine Warblers** seen, on North Ronaldsay on 9th and Fair Isle on 12th. Four **Marsh Warblers** were recorded on the latter island between the 11th–22nd with two others elsewhere on Shetland and one singing at Gramsdale, Benbecula (Outer Hebrides) on 11th June. Eleven **Red-backed Shrikes** were noted in June, all on the Northern Isles apart from a female at Fife Ness (Fife) on 9th–10th. Two different **Short-toed Larks** were on Fair Isle between 2nd–17th June, a **Red-rumped Swallow** was reported at Mey (Caithness) on 11th June (2nd county record if accepted), and the only two **Golden Orioles** in June were in Borders and South Uist. 12 **Turtle Doves** were reported in June, with in July, singles on Tiree and in North-East Scotland and seven **Common Rosefinches** in June and July were on Fair Isle (4), North Ronaldsay and Isle of May with a singing adult male at Newmachar (North-East Scotland) from the end of June–12th July. A male **Bullfinch** on Fair Isle on 13th–19th June was not a nominate race bird i.e. not a Northern Bullfinch – a first for Shetland therefore, all previous records having been of Northern Bullfinch. At least nine **Bee-eaters** were recorded in the period, with at least five different on Shetland, a party of three over Newmains, Reston (Borders) on 7th June and one over Pitcox (Lothian) on 18th July. An adult **Rose-coloured Starling** was at Horgabost, Harris (Outer Hebrides) on 6th–8th July whilst at least two different birds were reported on Shetland between 13th July and 7th August.

Common Rosefinch, North-East Scotland *(Harry Scott)*

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Two White-rumped Sandpipers, Shetland *(Dougie Preston)*

A drake **Ferruginous Duck** was at Loch Gelly (Fife) from 16th July onwards with a drake **Ring-necked Duck** at the same site from the 4th June (also seen off and on nearby at Loch Leven). Up to four drake **King Eiders** remained in the period: up to two on Shetland and birds in Ayrshire still and North-East Scotland.

Interim information has just arrived re. breeding of **Common Scoters** in the Flow Country. The adult population level remains constant but brood survival low with only 6 juveniles from the core sites in Forsinard – still only provisional, but the poorest result in the last 5 years. (Average fledging for the last 4 years is 13). **Black-throated Divers** on the reserve however had their best year ever with 4 pairs fledging 5 young in total.

Ferruginous Duck, Fife *(Al McNee)*

There was a large passage of adult *islandica* **Black-tailed Godwits** noted more or less throughout July into August including a site record count of 174 at Musselburgh Lagoons (Lothian) on 17th July, and on the 9th July 185 at Kinneil and 135 at Skinflats (both Upper Forth). In early August, a large passage of **Whimbrel** occurred off the Outer Hebrides including an unprecedented count of 516 birds past Labost, Lewis, on 7th. Four migrant **Wood Sandpipers** were reported in July whilst in early August four were seen in Lothian and two at Angle Park (Fife). There was a reasonable showing by **Green Sandpiper** with c.60 reported in July and early Aug. In June a **Pratincole sp.** flew east past Joppa, Edinburgh on 23rd and a **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** was seen briefly at Lossie Estuary (Moray & Nairn) on 27th. In July, following on from last autumn's record showing, three **White-rumped Sandpipers** were seen: up to two at Pool of Virkie (Shetland) on 22nd–25th and one on North Ronaldsay from 31st–1st Aug.

Fair Isle noted a successful seabird-breeding season for a change including the first **Arctic Terns** fledging there for five years. **Sooty Shearwaters** were reported from the 10th July with 30+ seen by the end of the month and then in early Aug reasonable numbers were seen off the Outer Hebrides including 36 past the Butt of Lewis on 7th and 62 off Labost, Lewis on 9th. Also an adult **Sabine's Gull** and 8 **Leach's Petrels** passed Labost on the 9th Aug. A Leach's Petrel was trapped overnight on the 7th/8th Aug during a Storm Petrel tape luring session at Fife Ness (Fife) with further birds also caught on both Fair Isle and North Ronaldsay in July. At the end of June, 11 Leach's Petrels passed Uisaed Point (Argyll) on the 22nd. The only **Cory's Shearwater** reported was off North Ronaldsay on 14th July whilst a **Great Shearwater** was reported off Sheigra near Kinlochbervie (Highland) on 11th July. The only **Balearic Shearwaters** reported were singles off Turnberry Point on 1st Aug and Saltcoats on 9th Aug (both Ayrshire) whilst also in early Aug, single ad. **Long-tailed Skuas** were reported off Cramond, Edinburgh on 2nd and St. Abbs (Borders) on 4th. An adult **Ross's Gull** was off Aird, Tiree on 9th Aug – an unusual though not unprecedented midsummer record, indeed the only other accepted Argyll record is also in August – off Frenchman's Rocks, Islay in 1976.

Angus Murray

As well as being based on records reported to Birdline Scotland in the period, additional information for the above summary was also provided by Deryk Shaw (Fair Isle), Eric Meek (Orkney), Martin Scott (Lewis), Stuart Benn (Highland), John Bowler (Tiree) and Steve Moyes (Perth & Kinross). Many thanks to all.

ISBN 0268-3199

Scottish Bird News

Scottish Bird News is the magazine of the SOC. It acts as a channel of communication for SOC members and disseminates information relevant to Scotland's birdlife. It is published four times a year in March, June, September and December. Articles and notices are welcomed and should be sent to the Editors at the address below no later than five weeks before publication. The views expressed are not necessarily the policy of the SOC. Contributors should note that material has to be edited, often at short notice, and it is not practical to let authors see these changes in advance of publication.

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The Scottish Ornithologists' Club (SOC) was established by a group of Scottish ornithologists who met together in the rooms of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society in Edinburgh on 24th March 1936.

The Club now has 2200 members and 14 branches around Scotland. It plays a central role in Scottish birdwatching, bringing together amateur birdwatchers, keen birders and research ornithologists with the aims of documenting, studying and, not least, enjoying Scotland's varied birdlife. Above all, the SOC is a club, relying heavily on keen volunteers and the support of its membership.

Headquarters provide central publications and an annual conference, and houses the Waterston Library, the most comprehensive library of bird literature in Scotland. The network of branches, which meet in Aberdeen, Ayr, the Borders, Dumfries, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Inverness, New Galloway, Orkney, St Andrews, Stirling, Stranraer and Thurso, organise field meetings, a winter programme of talks and social events.

The SOC also supports the Local Recorders' Network and the Scottish Birds Records Committee. The latter maintains the 'official' Scottish List on behalf of the Club. The Club supports research and survey work through its Research Grants.

The Club maintains a regularly-updated web site, which not only contains much information about the Club, but is also the key source of information about birds and birdwatching in Scotland. SOC is a registered Scottish charity (no SCO 009859).

www.the-soc.org.uk

Passwords to access members' web pages on the new SOC web site: 'marsh' & 'harrier'